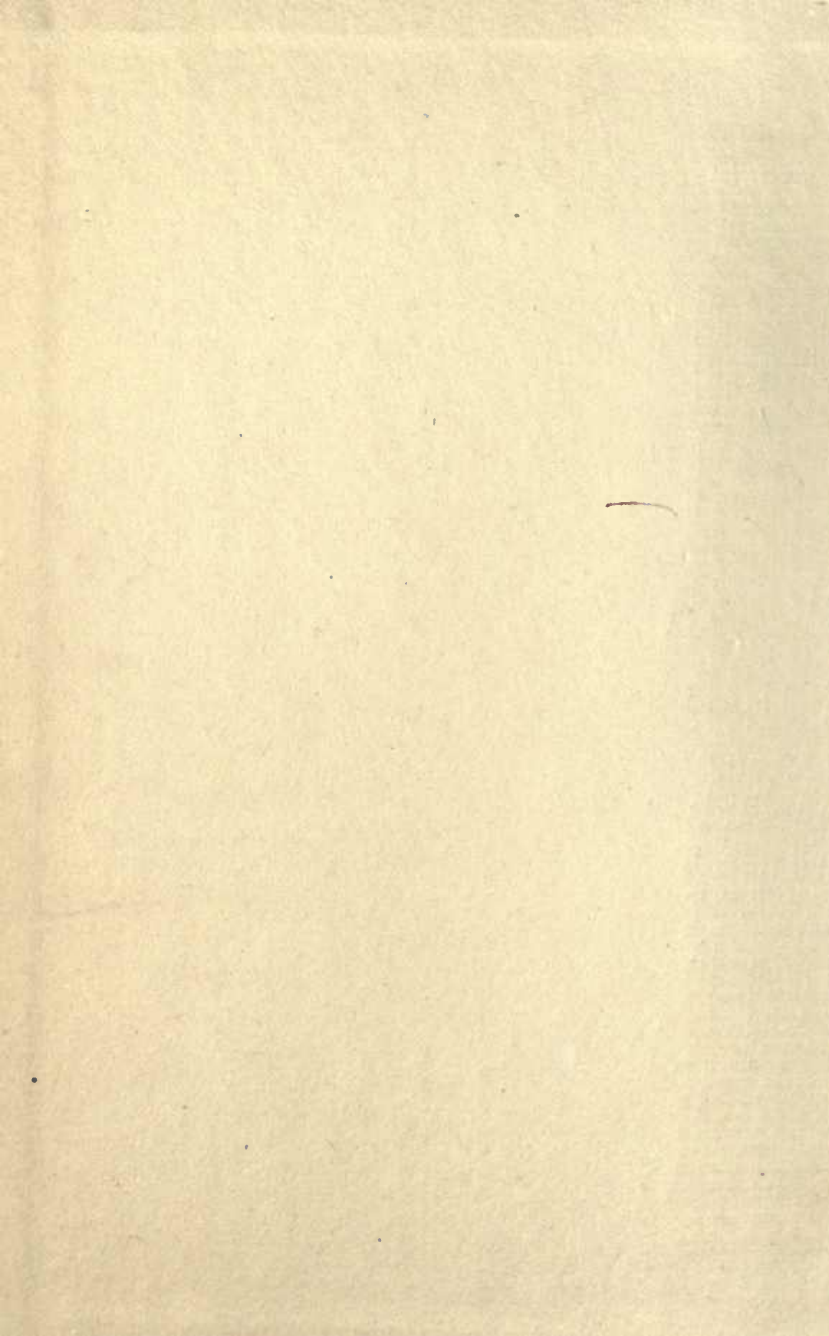


A DARK LANTERN

ELIZABETH ROBINS



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A DARK LANTERN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE MAGNETIC NORTH

THE OPEN QUESTION

BELOW THE SALT

GEORGE MANDEVILLE'S
HUSBAND

THE NEW MOON

A DARK LANTERN

A STORY WITH A PROLOGUE

BY

ELIZABETH ROBINS

(C. E. RAIMOND)

AUTHOR OF "THE MAGNETIC NORTH," "THE OPEN QUESTION,"
"BELOW THE SALT," ETC.

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BOOK I

THE PROLOGUE

CHAPTER I

UP the sharply defined path of red baize, from curb-stone to portico, and through the wide-set doors of the big house in St. James's Square, a stream of men and women for nearly two hours had been pouring.

Fewer were arriving now, and a few were even coming out. Powdered servants were summoning, while others were dismissing carriages, and still through the open door the little crowd of huddled street folk without (ranked on either side the red pathway) could watch the difficult passage through the crowded hall of the latest tiara, and grew tired of studying the great staircase packed with a congested mass of humanity unable to move up or down.

Lady Peterborough was one of the small group of great London hostesses whose absence is held to make a difference in the season. She and Lord Peterborough had been for over a year in India and the Far East. This was the first party given on their return.

Royalty had often before honoured Peterborough House with the presence, but to-night a recently married Princess, a popular idol, was to appear with her husband and two of her husband's brothers, German princelings who had been in England since the wedding, increasing their already considerable renown as men of marked accomplishment and 'fatal attractions.' And this was also the evening, as everyone knew, upon which the

great hostess was introducing her god-daughter, about whom nobody knew anything except that she was not yet eighteen and had been educated abroad.

A sudden commotion at the door; a pressing back; a flying whisper, '*The Royalties are here,*' went speeding up the great stair, acting upon that compact, inert mass as a powerful solvent. Under the magic of the phrase, the impossible accomplished itself.

Some twenty minutes later the elder of the two unmarried Princes was being presented to a tall, fair girl, the seriousness in whose big, wide-apart eyes was contradicted by the joyous mouth.

'My god-daughter, your Highness,' Lady Peterborough had said hurriedly, and turned to see who next, after her Grace of Lancaster, should be allowed a word with the Princess.

The foreigner, hardly looking, bowed with German military precision, and then his eye suddenly fixed. 'Oh,' he said, 'did I see you—weren't you at the last Drawing-Room?'

'Yes,' answered the girl.

'Of course you don't remember me——'

'I do remember you.'

'No! where was I?'

'You stood behind the Princess Marie, and your uniform was——'

'So!'—which he pronounced 'Zo'; with that exception his English was quite unforeign—'So! you did notice,' he laughed. 'Was that because I stared so?'

'Not all because of that,' she smiled back, 'though it made me more nervous than ever.'

'Were you nervous, then?'

'You saw that I was more nervous than anybody—that was why you——' she hesitated.

'Why I stared so?' he asked, amused.

'——why you laughed. It wasn't very nice of you.'

'Upon my word, I didn't guess the least in the world that you were nervous. You seemed unusually composed.'

'Then why did you laugh?' she demanded.

As he stood silent looking at her and still smiling, 'Ah!' she said quite low, flushing on a sudden—— 'Something was

wrong! Of course I thought of that. But it was too late to help it . . . and I've never known what it was.' She seemed to wait.

'What it was?' he repeated.

'Yes, what was wrong.'

'Will you dance?' he asked, quickly looking round as the first bars of a waltz sounded from the ball-room.

'No, I won't dance. Nor laugh, nor speak, nor *eat* ever again!' she said tragi-comically.

'What! You don't mean to take me to supper?' He leaned against the wall and contemplated her. While one of the suite, also detached, stood near talking with Bishop Brailton, the crowd round the rest of the royal party—little inner circle and larger one outside—all moved slowly away towards the small drawing-room off the ball-room, and the unfeatured mob flowed in between.

'It was something—something'—she was very serious now and the school-girl look was gone, but school-girl words were on her lips—'something you don't like to tell me.' As still he made no answer: 'something too dreadful to put into words.'

'Quite too shocking,' he assured her.

But the brutality of that nerved her. 'Nobody else seems to have noticed that I did anything odd.'

'Oh, they spare your feelings.' She glanced up at him half laughing, half dismayed. Then, gravely recalling other testimony—'They said my curtsey was all——'

'Oh yes, that was all——'

'And I didn't get tangled up in my train!'

'N-no,' he said, still seeming to enjoy some malicious remembrance.

'Which was it?' she said uncertainly, 'my feathers or my hair that was wrong?'

'Nothing wrong with your hair,' he said, looking at it in such a way as to recall her from that wonderful day of the Drawing-Room to the yet more vivid present. She grew a little confused under his bold admiration, but making a clutch at self-possession:

'Come then,' she said, seeing that the royal party with Lady Peterborough and a favoured few had disappeared in the direction of the music,—'after all, I see it will be best to drown the memory of that Drawing-Room.'

'I shall remember it always,' he whispered, as they joined the dancers.

He had to take a lady of high degree down to supper, but audaciously he telegraphed 'be sorry for me'; and though the young débutante smiled back radiant, she felt the occurrence to be in the nature of a loss almost too heavy for 'seventeen and a bit' to bear.

And still the pain of it was a thing nearer far to joy than any other gladness she yet had known. For did it not have its centre and its source in this gay and gracious, gently mocking, utterly beguiling soldier, who smiled your heart out of your breast, and left in its place a strange sharp rapture that now and then, as you tested its edge, took the breath like a rapier thrust—pricking you to a sense of life, beside which all the days before were as dead, and confined and without memorial?

The night wore on in a dream. The débutante danced, and laughed, and learned through one avenue and another that no coming out for 'long and long' had been so brilliant. Lady Peterborough was told that her god-daughter would be the rage—'She has a something——' 'She is apart——' 'She will set a new fashion in beauty.' And all the while the little school-girl, who should perhaps have been tucked up in bed, was thinking with thumping pulses, '*Does he like my hair? Will he ever forget whatever the dreadful thing was at the Drawing-Room? Yes, he certainly likes my hair—— Oh, but when he smiles!*'

He danced only once again with her, and at the cost of Bertie Amherst's waltz, too, so slow had this Prince Anton of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein been to realize how all the men were asking her 'keep one for me.'

While they danced, he asked her if she was to be at the State Concert. And he looked as if life hung upon her 'yes.'

She was coming? Ah, then '*At the Concert——*'

Was it a great swelling roar of music and of laughter, that filled her ears like the sea—no, hush! it was the sound of her own blood beating in her ears.

'What did you say?' she asked.

'Say?'

'Yes, about the Concert.'

'Why, that we shall meet.' Then, as she kept looking down

and said no word: 'I suppose you don't care about that?' Still the eyelids were unlifted, and the waltz swayed them like an outside power to which neither in the least contributed, only lent themselves in a mood of rapturous yielding. 'But *I* care,' he whispered, as if the long pause had not been.

And at the end he only said: 'Auf Wiedersehen.'

It was part of Kitty Dereham's prolonged childishness of mind, that she who fed her foolish young heart on poetry, on Scott and Dumas romance, yet did not for several days wholly understand what the thing was that had befallen her. She walked, all those early hours, in a land where a delicious vagueness reigned, in a happy freedom from all need to verify, forecast or question. It was enough to lower the eyelids and straightway see his face, to shut the ears against voices round her, and hear the rich eloquence, the all-sufficing promise: *Auf Wiedersehen*.

Three days and nights the dream hung suspended in that golden mist. And the Concert was not till to-morrow.

In the two little groups chaperoned by Lady Peterborough, having tea among the crowd on the terrace of the House of Commons, were those who, tired of getting patient hosts to point out great legislators, and who, even with other intervening balls that might have blurred remembrance, yet leaned across little tables or over the parapet, above the river, and talked of the famous night of the coming out.

'Oh, I say! It's time to draw a veil over that melancholy occasion,' Bertie Amherst at last broke in. 'You lacerate Miss Dereham's feelings. Look here, you know, I can't go on calling you Miss Dereham.'

'Why not?' demanded Katharine, smiling.

'—need I, Aunt Kate?' He appealed to Lady Peterborough.

'Ask Kitty,' she answered promptly.

'What do you say?' he appealed. 'We're kind of relations.'

'I never knew that.'

'Yes, ain't we, Aunt Kate?—god-cousins.'

'Of course, god-cousins.'

'I suppose you can call me Katharine then,' said the girl after an instant's reflection.

She looked up surprised when they all laughed. 'I don't know why you're so amused. Nor why you say talking about our ball would lacerate my feelings.'

'Why? Because it makes you think of H.R.H.'

She knew her face answered in swift scarlet. But she said steadily enough: 'Anybody would think we could only boast one Royal Highness——'

'There's only one you'd boast of.'

'Oh, and which is that?'

'Why, the one you fell in love with.'

The one I fell in love with! the girl echoed to herself.

'There, Miss Dereham—there is the member for Wickham,' and Katharine, fixing her big startled eyes on the new political light, seemed to wink at the refulgence. Her host jumped up and brought Mr. Hastings to Lady Peterborough. In two minutes, that gentleman was nearer forgetting his great public destiny than he had been since he left Eton—looking into Kitty Dereham's eyes.

'And so you've been in the gallery?' he was saying.

'Yes, in—in the gallery.' (In love!)

'Could you follow?'

'Follow? Oh yes! No. . . . Follow who?'

'Why, the debate on——'

'Oh no, I couldn't follow the debate.' (In love?)

'No wonder!' he averred indulgently. 'Beastly place the ladies' gallery.'

'I didn't mind it so much.'

'Not the grill? Didn't you feel it an insult to your sex?'

'I'm afraid I forgot to. I've heard it's the proper sentiment.'

'It must have bored you hideously, if you couldn't hear and couldn't see——'

(In love?) 'Oh, but I did see—tops of heads. We knew several of the people who got up and talked, only we had never studied the tops of them before. If we went often, we'd be'—her attention wandered . . . (in love!)—'be quite well acquainted with the tops—of the members' heads, I mean.'

'Yes, yes, I understand. So that if your acquaintance with a man was only a House of Commons acquaintance, and you met him at a different altitude——'

(The one I fell in love with!) '——yes—I'd have to stand on a chair to be sure it was the man I thought it was.' She spoke breathlessly, and was grateful when the fabulously clever young member laughed obligingly at her little jest.

'I should like to feel sure that under any and all circumstances you will remember me'—he took off his hat and held his head down for her to see the thin growth of fine brown hair on either side of a parting that looked twenty years older than his age.

On the way home Katharine sat so silent in her corner of the carriage, that twice her god-mother glanced sideways at the beautiful little face.

'Humph!' thought the astute old worldling, 'she is very quiet. And that young popinjay, Hastings, very suddenly finds that after all he may have a little time to dine and dance! Humph! Well—if his blood is bad, it's very distinguished. They say he'll have a career, too. It may be quite as well this comes so soon. I don't approve of the modern plan of late marriages. Specially for Kitty—with no mother, and that father.'

In love! The girl sat staring at the dim reflection of herself on the glass in front of the coachman's box, but with no sight in her big childish eyes. *That*, then, was the meaning of these enchanted days. That was why everything in life was trivial past expression save the State Concert and the meeting. She had been half asleep, and Bertie Amherst had waked her with two words:

'In love.'

What would happen *auf Wiedersehen*? And this she asked and answered over and over again. With slow delicious approach, lingering, making the most of every trifle, fashioning whole dramas out of each question: at what moment would he appear; where would his place be; and where hers? What uniform he would wear; what orders; whether he would have to sit by his cousin. The Princess, wherever she might be, would observe his preoccupation. She, Katharine Dereham, would not be looking in his direction when at last he would catch sight of her, yet mysteriously she would plainly see the sudden light in his eyes; and know how, dumbly, again and again he was appealing: 'Look at me! *Katharine!*' Ah! It would be delicious—but absolutely impossible, nevertheless—

for her to face him in that moment. The Princess would talk and smile in vain; the handsome head, with the hair brushed up from the forehead *à la Russe*, would turn again to Katharine, beseeching her. And still under some sweet necessity, she would look at everyone and anywhere else. The Princess at last would twit him: 'You are not listening—you look for someone?' Then he would fence, and smooth her ruffled feathers. Finally, just as Katharine would be thinking that with safety she might look at the back of his head, he would turn sharply, his eyes catch hers, catch and hold and—and—it was here that quick thrust pierced her breast, and all the world dissolved in glancing mist.

In love!

It was like this then. Heavens! and he was not Anton only, but Prince Anton! Well, what then? It was clear to her in that world of young imagining, where barriers exist but for gallant breaking down, and where the given case is always an exception—it was clear that the big foreign soldier was not a Prince alone, but that other august entity that men call Fate.

* * * * *

The Concert night was come. In the long queue they waited; Lady Peterborough; his lordship in the modern way, a little depressed under the extinguisher of his cocked hat; Bertie Amherst, who had joined them at the last moment, very smart in his guardsman's uniform, and very ready, it would seem, to make eyes at Katharine. She, sitting quite silent in the sharply broken dusk of the great carriage, looked at her companions' faces from time to time, by the sudden flashing in of electric light, which would vanish again like sheet lightning, as, driving on, they left that lamp behind and moved a little nearer to the entrance of the Palace.

Bertie was chaffing her for her silence and preoccupation. The girl laughed now and then, but at far other thoughts, hardly hearing his voice, let alone his words.

She sat stiffly in her corner that she might not crush her chifions and her flowers—sat with muscles unconsciously strained, as if to help the horses to reach the door. Oh, how slow they were! He would be *so* impatient. He would be thinking she was not coming. But I am! I am! I'm nearly there!

* * * * *

She had afterwards only the dimmest recollection of the going in, a vague medley of lights and jewels and the heavy scent of flowers—and then all without preparation, with none of those delicious gradations of approach,—with as little warning as a telegraph-boy at your door, there was Prince Anton—occupied in not stepping on the Princess Marie's gown. He did look up, he clicked his heels and gave a jerky little bow, a little hurried smile, and was gone! . . . on to those seats where the lesser Royalties sat. And that was all. She could not even see the back of his head.

She sat in her place, deaf, waiting.

Just once again that night she saw him. After the Concert was over, as she stood behind Lady Peterborough on the outskirts of a little group, she had a glimpse of him at the far side of the great room, laughing at something a highly-coloured, strange-looking woman was saying.

The girl stood rooted, staring over her shoulder.

'Come, child,' said old Lord Peterborough, drawing her hand under his arm.

Two days later she read in the *Morning Post*, that Prince Anton had returned to Schloss Waldenstein in the Riesengebirge.

CHAPTER II

KATHARINE was not to see the disturber of her peace for nearly three years.

He was twice in that time in England, but on the first occasion she was at the Peterboroughs' Devonshire place, and on the second in her bed with influenza.

In all that time, if the Prussian soldier ever left his dim sentry-box in her heart, it was but to appear 'on parade,' as it were, before the keen eye of the reviewing mind, with all his accoutrements burnished, shining, sword clanking, and bold eyes challenging the world. It would be when some other menaced the integrity of his kingdom that he would spring out of his hiding-place and stand *en garde* between Kitty Dereham and other men. With the precision of a mannikin in a Nüremberg clock he could be trusted to appear whenever the hour struck (the hour that threatened to be 'hers'), and having uttered his note of warning would jerk away behind the little door.

These apparitions, and, above all, these 'notes,' that rang with the remembered music of a man's voice, took to translating themselves out of little pictures into little songs . . . for that was how life crystallized for Katharine. This verse-making was already an old habit, dating from her seventh year, when her mother had laughed and cried over the first poem: '*On the Sickening Death of our Beloved Bullfinch.*'

Had the girl lived in the times when fine ladies strung rhymes as they strummed the harp, when a Lady Mary Wortley Montagu could cap verses with Pope to a chorus of admiration (or at least of envy), Kitty Dereham might have frankly cultivated her gift, if not have taken in it unabashed comfort or open credit.

But she was born into a society where manifestation of any such definite talent would be too great a peculiarity to be pleasant. A less sensitive person than she would have shrunk from the chaffing patronage of men and women whose ideal of accomplishment was to ride, dance, play certain games, know what to wear, what to say, and above all when to smile. The prevailing note was ridicule. The common aim, to evade its shafts by never being caught serious. A world where nothing was socially 'safe' but laughter.

Kitty's mother, though not born in it, had grown up in this atmosphere, and early gave the child her cue. This, too, with no guess of how strong 'the artist' was in the young soul, no hint of the long struggle to come between the *Weltkind* and the worldling; little knowledge of the imperious governance of an ideal of beauty; fear only of the dimly descried truth that if her child were so unfortunate as to be different from those with whom her lot was to be cast, the difference would lie chiefly in the fact that the poet they say has died young in the rest of us would live on in Katharine Dereham to the end.

From the first, however, she showed a decent reticence in the matter. So far as her own small performances were concerned, since her mother's going she had religiously kept them to herself. She felt now, it would be as easy to exhibit to the world the name 'Anton' written on her heart, as have shown these dim paraphrases on paper of that original and all-luminous inscription. These verses to the Nameless One became for her a kind of secret confessional where she might recite her griefs and doubts, and set forth her little sins and get absolution of her burden, by laying it down in orderly lengths on paper. Or again, in gayer mood, out of sheer joy in her faculty of vivid visualizing, she would summon the shining apparition out of the vast deep of absence, and, behold! with the regular tramp of measured verse, the foreign soldier would come marching, marching to the sound of trumpets—or of penny whistles, what matter?—since he marched right gaily and faithfully kept her time.

Lady Peterborough went to her grave without suspecting Katharine of this particular failing; but the arrant old heathen found quite enough to disapprove and laugh at in the romantic

little girl, whom she was not so much 'bringing out' as rigorously keeping in. The poor lady had her disappointments and her claim upon commiseration. Although she was never able to pluck up, or even to call by its true name, the root of Katharine's singularity, she was vaguely uneasy at the girl's elusiveness. Despite Katharine's gentleness, she was distinctly 'difficult,' and her steadfastness to some alien point of view—Heaven alone knew what it was precisely!—roused the irritation that comes of a 'difference' not boldly formulated, but tirelessly maintained. 'She has no true sense of values,' said Lady Peterborough. Like a dweller in a foreign land who has not mastered the currency, she would offer a sovereign where a shilling would serve, or present some strange coin whose very superscription the Peterborough eye could not decipher. The girl, in her turn, had her surprises. She was too young, too little a thinker, too much an impressionist to formulate, let alone to analyze, the Peterborough standards. It was only with certain outward manifestations that she at all concerned herself, such as the short measure meted out by her god-mother to intruders or mere bores; her mercilessness to people who stirred Katharine's pity. The girl was even simple enough to point out the large latitude Lady Peterborough was ready to accord to people of her own special world, who practically could do as they liked, being who they were. Katharine's lack of sympathy was as evident to her god-mother, when that lady engaged in the congenial occupation of crushing the socially weak, as when she amused herself by condescending to Art or to new-made wealth.

But in more important ways the girl failed to take her cue from the older woman. It was nearly a year after the coming-out party that she reappeared in the drawing-room one afternoon a little flushed, asking: 'Oh, have the Falconbridges gone already?' Ten minutes before, at his request, she had taken Robert Hastings to the library to look for a book.

'Yes, the Falconbridges have gone,' answered her god-mother.

'Bother!'

'Why bother? You've got some one to amuse you.'

'No, I haven't. There isn't a man in London so interesting as

Lord Falconbridge.' She drummed on the revolving book-stand. 'I wanted to ask him about the meet of the Coaching Club.'

'What about it?'

'If he's in earnest about having me on the box.'

'Where does he propose to put his wife?'

'I'm sure I don't know. I forgot her.'

'It's too common a mistake. It never does. Have you forgot Robert Hastings, too?'

'Oh, he's gone.'

'What did he have to say for himself?'

Kitty turned away.

Lady Peterborough put up her glass. 'Did he——'

'Yes,' the girl interrupted. Then hurriedly: 'Of course I said no. Such a silly idea'—and she went out.

What did the child want? Was it, after all, Bertie? Lord Peterborough's nephew (and next after an invalid and childless brother, his heir) had not been supposed to be in the running, having already pledged himself at the time of Kitty's appearance on the scene. But in two weeks he had broken his engagement, to the great scandal of 'everybody,' and declared openly for Kitty.

This had all happened months before, but throwing over the other girl had hitherto availed him so little that public opinion had been appeased. And he was a delightful person, was Bertie—perhaps after all—— The old woman sat and cogitated, but with the baffled feeling that she had never fathomed the girl. And yet Kitty seemed so simple. What did she want? Thank heaven she had no fads to stand between her and suitable arrangements, no crazy modern ideal of emancipation or philanthropy, no yearning to bind books or to bind wounds or to examine drains. Lady Peterborough had even been able to laugh her out of certain 'Popish superstitions' that she had brought with her out of France. It was reassuring that she had manifested a wholly healthy enjoyment in her success, played and dined and danced, smiled away her conquests, and waited. For what? A question often in Lady Peterborough's mind. She had times of fearing an infatuation for Lord Falconbridge. Women—girls too—had gone that way. For he was a brilliant being, brilliant with the triple splendour of the great

noble, the politician early in life effective in public affairs, the man of fastidious taste in Art and Letters. Notoriously indifferent to his wife, he had since his marriage, only four years before, had at least one liaison that the world knew of. The moment came when Lady Peterborough allowed Kitty to hear of 'that affair'; watched with satisfaction and much misinterpreted the shrinking of the girl; even congratulated herself on the timeliness of the disillusionment, thinking it only Falconbridge who suffered in her god-daughter's esteem.

It was the sort of occasion that revealed the girl's ignorance of the undercurrents sweeping through the stream she floated on. Lady Peterborough's opinion of her god-daughter was not enhanced by the conversation. Surely it must be infatuation for Falconbridge that could make any creature so blind. Of course, a young girl should seem innocent of such knowledge, but to *be* innocent—what was it but to be a fool? When she had at last made plain that people had given up trying to get Falconbridge to stay at their houses, unless Captain Waring's charming little wife were of the party, Kitty exclaimed on a note of stark wonder:

'And you do it, too!'

'Do what?'

'You asked her to Devon Court.'

'Naturally. The Falconbridges and Peterboroughs have always been friends.'

'And you blame people, blame me, for forgetting . . . Lady Falconbridge.'

'It's a thing I never do myself'—the answer came with a self-righteous ring; 'I always include her.'

Kitty got up with locked fingers. 'What must it be like!'

'What!'

'To be Lady Falconbridge.'

'A good many girls have wasted valuable time wondering.' The old woman fixed her eyes on the flushed childish face.

'Poor soul!' breathed Kitty.

'Don't make any mistake, it's the wife who has the best of it in the end. Remember that. It's the *wife* who can afford to wait. The other woman's day is bound to go; the wife's is just as sure to come.'

But the girl was as little sustained by the thought of an ultimate justice, as it might be the Countess of Falconbridge herself.

'To be "included"!—along with Mrs. Waring. And everybody, you say, *knowing!*'

'It wouldn't help matters to leave Lady Falconbridge out.' The girl turned suddenly. 'Now, Kitty, you are going to be tiresome. You are going to say, "leave the Waring woman out."'

'I was going to ask why not leave Lord Falconbridge out?'

Lady Peterborough merely smiled. There was a good deal in her face at such a moment. Kitty was easier under her frown—certainly when she smiled in that way she was rather awful. The girl turned from her with a feeling of sickness, but no sense of being unanswered.

They admitted such horrors—condoned, even smiled upon, *encouraged* them. The world rocked. She tried to steady herself with unflinching eyes wide to the shame of it. Life was like this, then. For people who were called 'the best,' called, with high significance, 'us,' who were lifted above the undistinguished herd, this was what life sometimes brought, and what 'we' could be induced to accept.

'No, no! A shuddering blackness fell. Flinging out hands that groped in the rocking dark, she found a hand that steadied her—it drew the cloud away, and, behold! a figure standing in sudden sunlight, smiling reassurance. Ah, yes. There were men not merely of noble house, but of princely heart.

The glamour of youth and of poetic imagining had veiled from Katharine's beauty-loving eyes much of the ugliness of the life about her. Not all at once, not for years, did the transfiguring light of Romance die out, and fall upon the dark—and even then only to be steadfastly rekindled.

She was not one of the girls who have to be forbidden books considered to be 'not quite jeune fille': a few pages of such works told her that these were not—or not yet—for her. She and her mother had together read much romance in poetry and prose, and when the girl found herself alone she clung the more to 'the kind of thing my mother liked'—feeling that so she found again and might hold fast to the dear hand. The 'Idylls of the King' led her back to Malory. In that book of delight she slaked

her thirst for things chivalrous and fair; and coming down out of her heights, thought herself practical in the outward expression of her tastes, when she looked into heraldry. That study proved full of just the kind of interest that appealed to her. In the Peterborough library the girl grew quietly wise in matters whose waning significance to the world mattered nothing. It was, however, a delightful surprise to find that her god-father knew about these things. What did he not know about, this kindly, whimsical old man, who seemed so entirely content to let his wife take the lead in everything, and who yet held quietly on his way, a way so remote from hers that you would never so much as hear of it, except by chance? Occasion would discover him on the expert's side of a question, but hardly by choice it would seem, seldom with any stress, never with undue emphasis; but few the questions of life or learning that took him unaware. You would know him for years, and never hear him hint at numismatic knowledge; but the moment come when authorities differed, he would speak the illuminating word. You would never have heard him mention Persian literature; till one night at dinner a discussion would arise between two Omarites about some Fitzgerald rendering, and Lord Peterborough would write the original line in character on the tablecloth to prove the case of the sounder disputant.

And so among other things he was a Herald! Kitty was enchanted, though he did spoil it by saying every man of leisure was more or less, and that it was a form of knowledge 'merely curious.' To the girl these symbols of bygone achievement in field or bower, love or war, meant 'History' of the sort that appealed most to her imagination, concerning itself as it did, not in the large way, with popular movements or the effect of laws, or even with the policies of Kings, but modestly though fervently with the fortunes of private families.

On those delightful occasions, all too rare, when Kitty went driving about the London streets with only her god-father, he would lend himself to the girl's preoccupation with the ancient and often childish hieroglyphs that men of old had stamped upon their names. In a pause he would suddenly say, to her obvious delight: 'Suppose we should overtake a knight riding along here, and see on his shield——'

'No,' corrected Kitty, who herself had invented this game, 'we'd see his arms first of all, on the tabards of his pursuivants——'

'No, we are before the days of tabards, before the jupon, even—but when we catch up with this knight we see his shield is: Argent, a human Heart, gules, proper; on a chief azure, six Lioncels of the Field——'

'No, six Mullets, not six Lioncels. Mullets, Mullets!'

He laughed; he had thought to catch her.

'You know the knight?'

'Of course—one of my particular friends, Sir James Douglas.'

'Then perhaps you'll tell me where he's going.'

'He is on his way to the Holy Land, and he's carrying the royal heart of Robert Bruce to bury at Jerusalem.'

'God speed,' the old man saluted, as if the knight rode by, 'and a safe return.'

'We won't see him again,' said the girl. 'He'll fall in Andalusia, fighting the Saracens.' She turned her head a little: 'Good-bye, James Douglas!' And for the hundredth time after some such trial of her knowledge or of his, 'Isn't it curious,' she said, 'to think that if he should really come riding along, of all the people in the street probably only you and I would know him.'

'Unless there were Douglasses about.'

'Even they might be in doubt—they'd think at first it must be one of them, but they'd say, "Where is the crown?"'

'Very like,' he humoured her fancy. 'They'd forget that the man who won it never wore it.'

'Now there's a lady coming—— Oh, no, it was as we crossed Oxford Street. Oxford Street *was* there, wasn't it, a long while ago?'

'Oxford Street—Watling Street—saw the Roman Eagles.'

'Well, these weren't Romans that I saw. It was a very great English lady riding with her knights and esquires. Her arms were: "Azure, three Fleurs-de-lys, in pale, or, between two Fla——"' The girl paused suddenly, and then flung up her hand with a joyous little hailing action in the direction of a hansom blocked for an instant in the crowded Piccadilly traffic.

Lord Peterborough stuck his glass in his eye, and scrutinized the good-looking man with an overdressed woman at his side, the two so deep in talk they were oblivious to the world. 'Well,' said Lord Peterborough imperturbably, 'go on with the lady's blazonry——'

Kitty, still turned to face the hansom, was smiling and lifting her hand.

'It's father, don't you see?' A slowly moving brougham shut out the hansom for a moment. When visible again, it was seen to be in the act of attempting to cross behind the Peterborough carriage into Sackville Street. But the policeman held up his hand. The press was great on that side.

'Oh, I *wish* he'd look through the window. Who is it he is with?'

'Hush!' said Lord Peterborough, for the lady was sitting on that side.

'Do you know her?' asked Kitty.

'No. Don't stare like that. It's only owls that can look over their spines without dislocation.'

The lady turned her head, and the underscored eyes fell upon the girl in the carriage. She must have said something. The man, who had been watching her face intently while he talked, glanced past her now, through the window: seemed to pause an instant in his fluent speech, and then, without the quiver of a lash, went on talking, as he dropped carelessly back out of sight in his corner.

'Father!' Kitty had said, signalling over the back of the carriage. Above the lady's head a man's arm was raised. It pushed up the trap-door. Some direction was given. In the dissolving crush, the cabby turned his horse and drove off in the opposite direction.

'How funny he didn't recognise us!'

'Who?'

'Why, father, of course.'

'You think it was——?'

'Think? Why, didn't you *see*?'

'I thought it was someone rather like him.'

'Oh no, it was father. Fancy his having got a new friend!' she exclaimed with animation—'a lady, too.'

‘Well, go on. What was the lady’s blazonry?’

‘I shall have to ask my father,’ she said, smiling.

* * * * *

When on Sunday she did so, it was to learn that he had been at Aldershot all Friday and Saturday. No, the circumstance was not so curious. There was another man in London for whom he was sometimes mistaken.

Katharine’s view of her father’s life was not very clear. It is notorious that the average young person accepts his (even more her) parents as he accepts the first landscape that greets his eyes. It is his only possible conception of the world.

Even Lady Peterborough’s adoring affection for the girl’s dead mother, the one great devotion in a singularly loveless life, would not have secured Katharine’s being installed as daughter of the house, except upon clear understanding that Colonel Dereham was not to appear there unless expressly bidden. Katharine knew from the first that her father was not appreciated by her god-mother, and that even her sworn ally, Lord Peterborough, regarded Colonel Dereham with a whimsical tolerance, that was for long the heaviest cross the girl’s proud heart was called upon to bear. In her thoughts of her father she conceived of him always as a gallant soldier too modest to make capital of his splendid services, too dignified to complain of being shelved. She saw that he spent his time when at home (in the little house he had taken in Hill Street) in smoking and reading French novels, and when he wasn’t at home he seemed always to have been at the Club or ‘taking a walk.’ Katharine felt it a grey existence, and wondered humbly at his uncomplaining acceptance of it—‘for her sake,’ as he sometimes explained.

His forbearance with the Peterborough attitude towards himself she found especially beautiful and noble. In spite of her mother’s dying wish, the girl offered, again and again, to leave Peterborough House and come to live with her father. He opposed the idea with an energy he seldom exhibited about anything, all of course a part of his unselfishness.

During Katharine’s schooldays at Auteuil, while she saw the Peterboroughs regularly two or three times a year, and

spent all her holidays with them in Devon or in Sutherlandshire, neither she, nor anyone she knew, ever saw Colonel Dereham, who was all that time in India. But the name of father stirred her deepest loyalty, and she could easily have made a case of conscience out of Lady Peterborough's perversity in regard to him, would rather have enjoyed making her sacrifice of Peterborough House and everything it meant, to be all in all to her 'poor lonely father.'

Her poor lonely father was, as a matter of fact, as little poor as lonely, and lived a life so entirely to his taste (albeit not in the full light of day) that nothing would so have disconcerted him as Katharine's constant companionship. In his gratitude to his dead wife's friend for taking his daughter off his hands, he quite forgave the implied criticism of himself. Problem enough to know what to do with his only child during the Peterboroughs' annual visit to Marienbad. For years Katharine marvelled that this time 'alone together,' always looked forward to, and built about with fair resolutions, should be so barren of comfort or reward.

Stupid of her, this, for she had a weekly opportunity of enlightenment. In spite of recurrent opposition from Lady Peterborough, the girl made a fetich of dining with her father upon every Sunday night that found them both in town. Vain for him nobly to propose to let her off this time; to give the servants their Sunday evening. 'Let them have Saturday . . . any evening but ours,' Katharine would say, and blithely set herself to bring some cheer into her father's life. It was notable that Sunday evening found both of them more cheerful than it left them. And still the stupid Katharine persevered. 'A young girl—at least a girl like me, isn't enough company for an experienced man like my father,' she decided.

'Why don't we sometimes ask people to dine on Sundays?'

'Oh-a—I hadn't considered it.' And he never did.

Another time: 'How late you are, father dear. I've been waiting three-quarters of an hour. I should think the dinner is quite——'

'Sorry, my dear. I couldn't get back sooner. You know what Sunday trains are——' he stopped on his way into the dining-room to open a telegram.

‘Oh, then you’ve been in the country.’

‘Country? Yes, in the country.’ He read the message again, and reflectively he tore it into small pieces before he sat down. He asked about the garden-party and the Castleton wedding. While they were at dessert the bell rang, and without waiting for a bidding, Captain Vance came in. He was one of the few people Katharine ever saw at her father’s, and it had not been the Captain she had in her mind when she suggested asking someone to dine. She had wondered at the intimacy between the two, Vance being a dull man with a sharp temper and a fiery face, who drank a great deal of brandy, and domineered over his brother-in-arms. Katharine considered that her father treated him with an extraordinary forbearance. Her own was plainly taxed. When Colonel Dereham remonstrated with her for her lack of cordiality, she spoke her mind about the Captain.

‘Oh, manners!’ her father had said in his indulgent way. ‘Manners aren’t everything,’ which was handsome as coming from a man whose own were singularly charming. ‘Vance is a good sort. He and his people were very kind to me, out in India, the year I had the fever——’

And the manners that were amended were Katharine’s own.

On this occasion the good sort drank rather more than usual. ‘He makes my father do it too,’ thought the girl, with her first sick misgiving in that direction.

Her slight attention to their conversation about somebody’s unfair promotion was suddenly heightened by Vance’s demanding in a truculent tone: ‘Wasn’t that exactly what I told you in Victoria Street this afternoon?’

‘Why, you couldn’t—he was in the country,’ said the girl.

Her father stared an instant, and then: ‘Oh—I came back this morning. But I was late—had several engagements to fit in. . . .’

It was the kind of little incident that was always happening, and that yet always took the girl by surprise.

It has been intimated that in certain ways Kitty was an uncommonly unperceptive person—unteachable even. Certain of her views she would not without a struggle submit to the corrective hand of experience. Her father was forgetful.

In spite of her perplexed effort at readjustment, she was at first bewildered, and later amused, at the superficial knowledge of French character that led English people to be surprised at finding that a girl brought up in France should entertain an innocent reverence for truth.

In discussing her difficulties on this head with Lord Peterborough, she found satisfaction in his theory that it was just because she had imagination of the rarer kind, that she was less tempted to misuse it in the common way. For her godfather had stumbled on the fact that Kitty wrote verses——: ‘It’s all right, little girl, I won’t tell anyone. Come, cheer up. Let’s see what they’re like.’

She shut the sheet of paper in a book. ‘Oh I couldn’t—simply couldn’t.’

‘Oh yes you can.’ But as she still sat grasping the closed book with such determined hands that her knuckles showed white under the skin, her old friend persisted, ‘It’s all right to show *me*. Shall I tell you why?’ She looked up. He was smiling in that whimsical way of his, but he lowered his voice to a kind of conspirator’s pitch. ‘Do you want to know why?’ She nodded. He looked all round the room, still smiling, but as if to make sure they were really alone, and in a whisper he said: ‘*I’ve done it myself.*’

‘No.’

‘Yes.’

‘Does *she* know?’

He shook his head with a comic air of terror.

‘You won’t tell her about my—my . . . ’ faltered Kitty.

‘No,’ he said, ‘not unless you betray me. If you did that I’d be capable of anything.’

‘Where do you hide . . . what you do?’ He motioned with his fine head towards a brass-bound bureau. ‘You’ll show me?’ she asked.

‘Should you like me to?’

‘Awfully. When do you do it?’ whispered Kitty, coming nearer.

‘A—a—I don’t do it much now.’

‘Oh.’ She paused disappointed.

‘I’m too old,’ he hastened to explain — ‘and too easily scared.’

‘But you used to?’

‘Oh, for years.’

‘May I see them now?’

‘They won’t interest you, my dear. They’re merely academic.’ Then she knew he had recalled the sins of his youth to put her at her ease. But it turned out a great comfort to have told him. For one thing he never, by so much as a hint, seemed to read anything autobiographic in her effusions—discussed them upon such purely impersonal ground, that the girl lost her first sense of agonized shyness, and even came to think of these things of hers as quite unprompted by any actual experience.

He agreed it was best not to show them to anyone else, not even to dear Blanche, who was her greatest girl friend,—and yet Lord Peterborough liked some of them, he said. He certainly gave himself the trouble to take them with sufficient seriousness to point out blemishes, and to instruct the young versifier in certain rules of rhetoric and prosody. They spoke of Katharine’s productions as: ‘Our Guilty Secret.’

CHAPTER III

AFTER wintering on the Riviera, the Peterboroughs went to Rome in the spring of the year that Kitty was nineteen. There, at the house of the Principessa Lucchese, the girl met one afternoon the little Gräfin von Hartung, who was a distant cousin of Prince Anton of Breitenlohe Waldenstein, and knew him 'Oh, very well indeed,' she said. Like the rest of the Roman world, she had been looking forward to seeing him here after Easter. And now this news—oh! it was too exciting. What, Miss Dereham had not heard? Well, he was anticipating his visit by at least five days—something evidently afoot, for he was coming that very afternoon upon the summons, rumour said, of a certain great lady. Of course Miss Dereham had heard. No? not who the latest victim was? It was plain the little Gräfin herself had come under the spell, but her rôle was that of the shocked chronicler. She gave spirited accounts of the Prince's more recent exploits—accounts that, touching with some frankness upon love-stricken ladies, Kitty as frankly elicited as she secretly shrank from, dreading the point of each scene in the story, as if it had been a rapier playing about a vital part. 'But people seem ready to forgive Anton anything,' his cousin ended, smiling.

'If you see him soon——'

'I'm quite sure to—to-morrow I should think.'

Oh, happy little Gräfin! 'Well, tell him,' Kitty said at parting, 'tell him that the girl he laughed at, at the Drawing-Room in London three years ago, has *not* forgiven him.'

The papers the next morning announced the Prince's arrival.

In the days that followed, wherever she went, Kitty's one thought was: 'Will it be here, or here, that we shall meet?' The

very stones in the streets, that to other ears said, Virgil, Cicero, Cæsar, cried 'Anton!' the length and breadth of Rome. Wherever she went, whatever said or did, every sense was concentrated upon recognition. 'Shall I find him here, driving on the Pincio? Small chance of his being in St. Peter's! Does he ever fill a vacant hour in a gallery? Or is he killing time at the Gräfin's . . . until I come? If nowhere else, I'll find him at the Quirinal Ball.'

But at none of these places did they meet. At the first evening party given by the Principessa Lucchese, after the Prince's arrival, suddenly there he was. Katharine looked at him with eyes almost unbelieving. Was this he? In some strange way it was not. The man seemed unaccountably less real standing before her, in his habit as he lived, than he had been, marching through her songs, or keeping quiet guard in the sentry-box of her heart.

'You had my message?' she asked, feeling instantly that her words came too faintly and across too vast a distance to reach their goal. She had been talking to him in her heart, sending messages for two long years . . . he had never yet replied. But now he was smiling and saying in the old thrilling voice:

'What message?'

'You have not seen your cousin?'

'What cousin? I have so many.'

'The Gräfin von Hartung.'

'No. Is Gerda here?' (Oh, lucky Gerda to be so called by him!) But he did not look for her; his voice was innocent of interest in Gerda; his eyes were on the face before him.

Had Kitty any unformulated misgiving as to what the meeting meant to him, it vanished. He had seen her across the room. People had turned their heads with surprise to see him coming straight to where she stood, between an ancient dame and an English diplomat. He had spoken her name as readily as had it been the night of the coming out, and turned a little to one side, adroitly shutting out of Paradise, Diplomatist and Dame.

Katharine did not know that more than one having the reverberant voice, had already been celebrating her advent in

Rome, and that elsewhere in these two years Prince Anton had not escaped being reminded, from time to time, that he too could claim acquaintance with what the new poet, Michael Craven, had called 'the most unforgettable face in England.'

What a blessed piece of fortune that the Gräfin had not had the chance to prepare him! How could one in that case have been so sure, Kitty asked herself—so blessedly sure, that he as well, had lived these two years 'waiting'? But while patience may be a grace in a girl, the same thing in a man wears a mocking face, unless there are 'circumstances' . . . explanatory barriers, nobler to leave standing than untimely to beat down.

'It is a long time since we met,' she said, innocently opening the door forthwith to explanation.

'Dreadfully long,' he answered—and left a pause she had no skill to fill. He filled it with a bold excursion of the eyes, and then: 'I've always known I should see you again,' he said.

Could declaration in a crowded room be plainer? She dropped her gaze upon her fan.

'I was afraid you would have forgotten——' he went on.

'Forgotten?'

'Yes, forgotten our meeting.'

'Oh no, I had not forgotten our meetings!' She smiled faintly and was quickly grave again, afraid to express even so little where so much waited ready to rush forth.

'I've often thought of'—he seemed to reflect an instant—'those meetings.'

'Yes——'

'I knew I could count on there being a third.' She looked up quickly, and met his smile. 'They say, you know, if there are two there's sure to be a third.'

'The third . . . ' she began and hesitated, for that long ago third had power even now to dash her spirit.

'Don't tell me you've forgotten we met twice,' he said imploringly, 'for you said yourself "our meetings."' A troubled wonder held her tongue. '*I* remember perfectly each time.' He lowered his voice. 'Was it likely I should forget?' She glanced down once more at the glittering paillettes on her fan. To eyes as practised as the Prince's, through the veil of grave

shyness over the drooping face, came dimly a gleam of hidden fires. The old need fell upon him, to blow the faint-seen spark to the bigness of a bonfire—though life was disappointing, the flame was commonly of the farthing-dip description, or at best a fire of straw. He looked at the face bent over the fan—was promise there of stuff less easily yielded up to smoke? ‘Don’t you remember the ball—that ball where we danced together?’—she looked up waiting. It was plain his boasted memory was guiltless of a notion of where the ball had been. ‘And then I saw you at the Drawing-Room. I remember the Princess Marie whispering——’ he stopped suddenly.

‘What did she whisper?’

‘Oh—a—,’ a little motion indicating and dismissing a tribute to uncommon looks—‘the sort of thing you’re always hearing, and then she said something about your taking it all as calmly at if you’d done nothing else all your life. I swore I’d catch your eye and see if I couldn’t’—he laughed, interrupting himself. ‘But by that time you were gone, and an awkward horror was wriggling with agony in front of the Queen.’

‘But you did catch my eye. And we talked about it afterwards at the ball.’

‘Yes,’ he said with animation, the sequence of their encounters being thus providentially cleared up, ‘the ball was the second meeting.’

‘And the third——’ she began, needing consolation after all this time for the pain it had brought—‘the third——’

‘Here!—by a stroke of uncommon luck. Where shall the fourth be?’

The Cavaliere Ginnasi had come in late and evidently did not realize who the Prince was. He stood bowing in front of Katharine and presenting Donna Pia, his daughter, adding that Lady Peterborough had just promised to bring Miss Dereham out to them at Albano, the following Wednesday, to a little festa. During the Cavaliere’s brief reference to the yearly holiday that his house had been in the habit of giving to the peasantry round about, Prince Anton stood rather stiffly, not sharing in the conversation even when appealed to, obviously waiting with scant patience till the interrupter should betake himself elsewhere. In the midst of a remark of the old gentleman’s, the Prince, with

a calmness attainable only by the two extremes of the social scale—by the utter boor and the person of exalted rank—turned his broad shoulder on the suave little Italian, bent towards the English girl and said under his breath, 'I am waiting to be told where the fourth is to be.' Kitty seized hold of her self-possession and hurriedly asked his Highness' permission to present—but the Cavaliere had not waited. He was stiffly leading the Donna Pia towards a group that seemed less absorbed. Looking back later, Kitty knew that the moment when the Ginnasis heard who was the foreigner with the atrocious manners, was the identical moment when her name was first linked in gossip to Prince Anton's. For there were those in the great salon waiting to renew, and many more waiting to begin, acquaintance with the man who stood beside Miss Dereham, saying: 'Of course I can't hope it will seem as important to you as it does to me. The fourth meeting, I mean.'

'What,' she asked a little forlornly, remembering with poignancy the occasion he forgot,—'what would be my excuse for thinking so?'

'I'll tell you—when I dare.'

She did not receive it with the ready coquetry he was used to, nor yet with the shy confusion he would have understood.

'I went back to England again—*twice*,' he seemed to make out a strong case for himself. 'But I couldn't find you.'

'You did try?'

'Well, of course.'

She sat down on a divan feeling a little breathless. It was coming! But hush! Wait! Not here must it find her. Had life and training left her less slow to feel the unfitness of the time and place, the room full of eyes pecking surreptitiously at the Prince, would have pricked her to realization; and Lady Peterborough's pleased vigilance across the space dividing them would have reminded the girl that she was accorded her five minutes tête-à-tête not to look Destiny in the face, but to fasten in her cap yet another feather—this an uncommon fine one—that should set off past trophies and win others new. Homage from this man lent any beauty lustre.

'How long shall you be in Rome?' she asked.

'How long shall you?'

‘Two weeks.’

‘I shall be two weeks.’

He tried to make her meet his look. Not even his silence helped him. But she was not easily embarrassed, he observed. Was she then so used——? Was she as blasé as he had found many a girl quite as young, and almost as innocent-seeming?

‘Are you much here?’ he said, bowing to someone who had succeeded in catching his eye.

‘You mean here at the Palazzo?’ she asked. He saw that her glance rested on the group in the middle of the room, where, stationed boldly under the full blaze of the chandelier, Lady Peterborough was holding forth to her hostess and the Monsignore Mazzuoli, in an Italian as fluent as Kitty knew it was atrocious.

‘Oh yes, we are here oftener than at any house in Rome. They have been friends for fifty years, those two—those three in fact.’

‘The Monsignore too?’

‘Yes, the Monsignore too.’

‘Fifty years is too long!’ he laughed.

‘Too long for what? Friendship?’

‘Too long for most things,’ he said with a slight impatience.

‘Not too long for——’ She stopped short. His wandering look came back to her. What was she blushing so furiously about?

‘Not too long for what?’

The girl stood up, as her colour deepened painfully. ‘She is making me a sign—Lady Peterborough is.’

‘I am making you a sign.’

Not here—not here,—her fluttering look seemed saying as, back and forth, among the glancing lights, from face to face it went, like a butterfly pursued across a flower bed. Not here—not here——

‘Good-night.’ She folded the shining wings of her fan.

‘You mustn’t go till you finish your sentence!’ he said.

‘We haven’t time—not for—for what I was going to say.’

‘Not time? Why, we’ve got—fifty years.’

He drew her eyes to drown in his. She caught at her breath frightened, and without a word moved towards the centre of the great room to meet her god-mother. He followed close.

'What have you been doing all this time since I saw you?' he was saying over her shoulder.

'Very little'—then suddenly, with a vision of the Gräfin, and remembrance of the great Roman lady: 'But *you?*' she paused to ask.

'I?'

'Yes, what have *you* been doing?' she insisted.

'Waiting for to-night.'

* * * * *

It was the first time within their experience that Lady Peterborough and her god-daughter had cared to see much of the same person. That they should do so, for once in a way, made life singularly smooth. It removed a quite recent stone of stumbling. Kitty was content now to fall in with projects more suitable to her age and condition, than mooning about Rome in quarters that were not even 'show' places, accompanied only by her god-father and a new protégé of his, a beggarly librarian.

Lord Peterborough's views about the Prince were not easy to elicit. Kitty's desertion did not induce the old man to spend more time in the bosom of his family. The only difference now being that he retired alone each morning to haunts that had lured him when he was young, and never lost their charm—certain musty book-lined halls to which he returned with unabated zest each time throughout the years, whenever he revisited Rome. He had certain musty friends there, and one who wasn't musty—men learned in the art of illumination and the literature of the early Italian MS. Commonly he went to them—once in a great while his friends, musty and otherwise, came to him. Lady Peterborough had observed with misgiving Katharine's partiality for the aforesaid librarian, a dark-visaged young man, of hot temper and radical tendencies, to whose scholarship Lord Peterborough took off his hat, and to whose damnable opinions he listened, smiling. Lady Peterborough provoked their utterance (on the one or two occasions when she came to speech with the young radical) in order that she might crush them and him. Since she had not succeeded as well as she could wish, she felt the need of keeping an eye on Signor Giovanelli. The creature was not ill-looking, and bore himself with a certain sullen grace. When her ladyship heard he was so poor that he got money to

buy new books by binding old ones, she gave him commissions. But 'like all that tribe, he is not really grateful,' she remarked aside when, during one of Prince Anton's visits, Signor Giovanelli was announced. He produced a packet of French Memoirs, that had gone to him in rags, transfigured now in fair white vellum bindings, delicately tooled and ornamented with gold lettering.

Lady Peterborough looked at them critically, as if trusting to find a flaw in the careful work. Prince Anton, who had found his cue in Kitty's sympathetic reception of the man, took up one of the volumes and turned it over, with open admiration. Lady Peterborough simply looked at him with that expression her intimates knew so well: 'You're on the wrong road, my friend.' But the girl's face told another, kinder story, and as silently besought support.

'It is not easy,' said the Prince with the air of a connoisseur, 'not so easy to get such work done.'

'I shouldn't think you ever tried,' said his hostess dryly.

'My sisters have; at home, in England and in France. I've seen the results.' He was turning to the young man.

'I can tell your sisters of dozens,' Lady Peterborough interrupted, '*dozens* who do this kind of thing—do it well.' She seemed to distinguish the present workman for inefficiency.

'May I have your address?' asked the Prince, while Kitty glowed with suppressed approval. But the angry young librarian replied in French that her ladyship was quite right, and there was nothing unusual, not even unusual badness, in the work in question. Anton persisted and further complimented the scheme of decoration.

Ah, how good my prince is! Kitty thought.

'Really? You *like* this?' pursued Lady Peterborough. 'Oh, that plain one Kitty's looking at is at least inoffensive. But this. Now why in heaven's name so big a coronet?' She arraigned her beneficiary. 'And one won't do for you. You must plant a crown in every corner. She dabbed at each repetition of the device with a bony finger, and raised her eyes on a sudden to the Prince. 'Do you wonder why this gentleman makes so much of coronets?' She smiled her wickedest. 'Signor Giovanelli is a Socialist.'

'And to think,' said his benefactress when he was gone, 'to

think that that little black Obscurity objects to the monarchy, and rages against——'

'Oh, *that's* not why you dislike him,' said Kitty. 'You have no patience with anybody who is poor.'

The old woman gleamed at her god-daughter's rare appreciation. 'Quite true. I do not like people who have nothing. Still less people who have nothing but a grievance.'

But 'the greatest gentleman of all the world' had shown himself incapable of harshness towards a poor student. And how, for her sake, he bore with Lady Peterborough's intolerance and caprice!—though no one knew more unerringly than the Prince how to put down presumption. There was the time when, just as they were going in to luncheon with a large party, Mr. and Miss Fox-Dorland were announced. Lady Peterborough's expressive countenance conveyed that they were too assiduous, even for persons violently rich. They explained that they had been asked for this day by Lord Peterborough.

'Oh, he will be sorry he forgot,' said Kitty in the chilling pause, pitying Miss Fox-Dorland. 'But he may come in at any moment.'

'Not in the least likely. Peterborough has no sense of his responsibilities.' She publicly washed her hands of these guests of her husband's, knowing as well as Kitty did, that the absent host wished to show kindness to the children of an obliging and erudite collector of Illuminated MS., themselves ambitious of quite other distinction.

The plain daughter, past her first youth and not yet arrived at temerity, was subdued from the beginning and scarcely opened her mouth, except to put food in it. Her young brother was not so easily choked off. He wrestled with the conviction that if only Lady Peterborough—above all Miss Dereham—realized what a very smart young man he was, they would claim him for their inner circle upon the general exodus to London.

'I've been at San Moritz,' he announced. 'It's been the best season they've ever known.' This eliciting nothing: 'Are you often there?' he asked Miss Dereham.

'Only once, two summers ago.'

'In the *summer*! Oh, it's horrible, I believe, in the summer. Winter's the time.' Lady Peterborough was keeping an inimical eye on the young man. He felt himself in the full lime-light.

'You ought to go for the Sports. Your friend Lady Muriel Tatton was there this year.'

'Was she?' said Kitty.

He nodded with nonchalance. 'In great form, too. We skated a lot together—that is, whenever I could get away from the Hon. Mrs. Bernard Hayes. She was always getting up hockey parties, or making me go tobogganning with her. Oh, she's great fun!' He looked down the rather silent table and to his joy caught Prince Anton's eye. 'Do you know Mrs. Bernard?' he demanded.

There was a perceptible pause. Then, 'No,' said the Prince, speaking from the top of a long flight of stairs, yet not, Kitty felt, with Lady Peterborough's offensiveness.

'Oh, I thought you looked as if you did. Most people know Mrs. Bernard. Prince Henry of Prussia says she's the most wonderful woman for her age he's ever known. She certainly keeps one busy,' he laughed.

'Ah!' said Lady Peterborough, 'did she manage to keep you busy?'

'Rather!' he laughed again to show that he was impervious to the pervading chill. 'From morning till night.' He turned instinctively to Miss Dereham—'And she's so awfully a—well-known, don't you know, it was a—a little conspicuous. I didn't altogether like it. I used to hear people asking "Who is that Mrs. Bernard's got hold of this year?" And at the hops she would insist on my leading the *cotillon* with her. Didn't altogether relish it, when I'd hear new-comers asking, "Who is that who's dancing all the time with Mrs. Bernard?" Same thing morning, noon and night—a woman as *répandue* as that, you know, in the most stunning togs—and everybody staring, and whispering, and asking who I was.'

A pause.

'Well,' said Prince Anton, 'and who were you?'

The incident did not, except in the Fox-Dorland mind, rebound to the Prince's discredit. He had meted deserved punishment—and, after all, in Kitty's opinion, the drafts made on his forbearance by Lady Peterborough, might well leave him with little over for a chance young popinjay. 'How beautiful he is to her for my sake,' thought the young egoist—and yet not wholly

without realization that it is men of a different world from his, who imagine they may with safety ignore older women as a class. Where it may be done with impunity—without effective reprisals—the society is in a barbaric or a childish stage. No such error was likely to be made by a man like Anton of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein—but the reason of his correctness was, in this particular case, as far from acquired caution, as it was from natural piety. If women must grow old, this, in his opinion, was how they should do it—arriving at the dread late stage in the long journey with forces concentrated; important because dangerous; tolerable because amusing; the social gift sharpened to a razor's edge; as competent to lift a favourite high, as to crush an inferior under foot.

Lady Peterborough, for her part, regarded him not alone as a timely object-lesson to Kitty—himself so plainly unattainable for more, that he was one of the few who were absolutely 'safe,' standing there as he did, on the other side of the royal gulf, and yet offering a standard by which to shrink little students and Fox-Dorlands into their proper nothingness.

Prince Anton, in his turn, amused Lady Peterborough, and took her back to the days of her youth when, as the Ambassador's daughter, she was much at the German Court. Full of social inventiveness where her own entertainment was at stake, she was indefatigable in devising ways of adding to the chances of a meeting. Not once, but twice, sometimes even three times a day, in those enchanted weeks, did Katharine see the face she had waited two years for a glimpse of. Never mind if the owner's kinship with the occupant of 'the Perilous Siege' was not so easy to verify, when Anton sat at Lady Peterborough's side, relishing her wit, condoning her cruelty, convulsed with amusement at some *sotto voce* story. In the minutes when they were alone, he and Katharine walked in that enchanted forest, that in the older lands, as well as in the new, is virgin still. If he made a false step sometimes, said something that jarred or vaguely troubled, Katharine was quick to think: that is the kind of thing Lady Peterborough, or girls like the Gräfin, make him say. If 'one of the most worshipfullest men, and one of the best knights in the world,' thinks meanly sometimes of girls and women, it is girls' and women's fault. Never for an instant did she doubt that he would gladly take a nobler view of the sex, were it pre-

sented. He, on his part, equally quick to readjust himself to a nature whose very aloofness and fastidiousness were a charm while they yet were new. Far from unpleasant to be worshipped by a *dévoté* like this; a refinement of pleasure even, to let her little prudishnesses, her odd, old-fashioned dignity have their day . . . to lead her by degrees, and without her conscious loss of faith, into a different world.

It must not, however, take too long. He rubbed his eyes when he realized how much time he had already given to the undertaking, and how little he could yet gauge his progress.

'You don't seem the least sad,' he reproached her, 'that these days are nearly over.'

'I would be if——'

'If?'

Smiling: 'If there were no more days.'

'Is that an invitation to England?'

'Do you need an invitation?'

'You won't be surprised to see me, then?'

'Oh, no,' she answered with that odd directness of hers.

'You will be surprised if I *don't* come? Is that it?'

She smiled again.

'Say yes,' he implored, thinking that to make her admit so much would be the work of an hour. But the answer came on the instant.

'Yes.'

Extraordinary how bold the shy thing is, he thought, but what he said was:

'Of course. You knew.'

'Knew . . .?'

'That I couldn't possibly stay away. Didn't you?'

Again she took his breath by saying:

'Yes.'

'When did you—did you realize?' he asked.

'Why, the night we met again.'

'You mean at—a——'

'At the Principessa's.'

It amused him to find she had antedated his subjection by so many days—little knowing she waited now, expecting him to correct her for post-dating it three years.

CHAPTER IV

THE last night of the stay in Rome, Lady Peterborough was 'At Home.' Prince Anton had been dining with her. For the first time she found him a little heavy in hand. 'After all, these Germans——' He would wake up, perhaps, when the great bare salon began to fill with the cosmopolitan throng that would be coming during the evening to bid the Peterborough party good-bye. Kitty was radiant. Well, at all events she was going home heart-whole! As for Lady Peterborough, she was sorry herself, this time, to leave Rome. Really, she must try to import that Prussian princeling into England. Though he had been dull to-night, he was usually the reverse.

'It is too bad,' Kitty was saying at that moment, 'we are to stay three weeks in Paris on the way home.'

'Don't you like Paris?'

'Yes, but I don't want to break the journey this time. We shan't get to London till Saturday the 28th.' As he said nothing she went on quite low: 'You'll come on Sunday?'

'Sunday? What Sunday?'

'The last in May.'

'The day after you get home?'

'Yes.'

He smiled. 'If that isn't rather soon.'

'*Soon!*'

'It doesn't seem soon to *me*,' he agreed—'it's an eternity.'

'Yes,' she said, and sighed on the single syllable. 'It's too bad you are called back to Waldenstein—or else you might meet us in Paris.'

That was all very well! he argued internally, half laughing, half serious, but what precisely did she mean? Where were

they? Ridiculous that he wasn't the least sure. And he had known this girl two years; seen her constantly for two weeks. And she had not been out of his head now for days.

'Come and have a talk in the little room off the gallery,' he said.

'I can't.'

'Why not?'

'Oh, I—I have to be here,—but I shall see you in London,' she said to console herself as well as him.

'Oh, London. As you say, it's an eternity to wait. Besides, I don't know about London.'

'Why don't you know about it?'

'I can't tell you here.' Seeming to stroll idly among the coming and going guests, a word here, the machine-made bow, a laugh over his shoulder, and he stood at last at the great folding-doors. He turned and looked back at Kitty.

Lady Peterborough, seeing him apparently on the way out, said hurriedly to the girl:

'Ask Prince Anton to speak to me again before he goes.'

More people were arriving. The Prince yielded place, glanced back and saw Kitty coming. He was in the corridor when she reached him with the message.

'I don't usually go away without a proper leave-taking, do I?' And now he was leading her towards the little room, past the musicians grouped outside. Katharine debated hurriedly within herself.

It was not among the possible things, she felt, for a girl to follow a man out of a crowded drawing-room and go to talk with him in another room alone. She stopped with an air of regretful determination. He read her instantly, and before her protest got beyond her eyes, he had turned to the flower-filled recess, just beyond the great staircase, where a long oval window, blotted out now with drawn curtains, looked in daylight on a court. In front of the curtains a tapestried seat where Katharine sometimes read or dreamed. A shaded lamp hung in the arch above, but when the window's eye was shut, the nook was but little open to observation. Prince Anton held his arm across the branches of the oleander for Katharine to pass. She did so mechanically, but once in the niche, stood still, saying with a lift of voice to be

heard above the music: 'I can't wait, I'm afraid. Lady Peterborough only sent me to——'

'To bring me back. You can't go without me.'

'But you'll come.'

'In three minutes. And for those minutes you are to sit here.' He stood before her.

The voices of a party of new arrivals coming up the stairs mingled with the music of the serenade. Through the leaves of the formal rank of flowering shrubs the girl saw the shine of gowns go glancing by—even recognised faces; by reaching forth a hand might have touched some oblivious passer. And yet as well have gone, as he had suggested, to the little ante-room opposite.

She had sat down, and now, as on this thought she suddenly rose up, he arrested her with the words: 'Are you going to be like this in London?'

In the long thin chain that hung about her delicate neck she locked her fingers. Unconsciously near to snapping she strained the fragile links. As still he waited, she forced herself to say:

'When you come, you'll see what I'm like.'

In the seconds that had gone by, his thoughts had made such far excursion that he said: 'Come where?'

'To Peterborough House—on the last Sunday in the month.'

'I don't know about doing that.'

That lifted sudden eyes, and brought quick words. 'Why don't you know?'

'Why should I go to England?' The swift reproach in the little face pulled him down beside it. 'It's all right,' he said, laying his hand on hers as he sat down.

'Is it all right?' He felt the fingers tremble.

He laughed softly. 'Of course.' Until now, sitting quite near each other, they had been talking with an effort above the music. Suddenly the serenade ended, with an effect of drawing back the curtain behind which they two, in the recess, had been as well concealed as behind closed doors. The world flowed into the corridor upon the tide of voices from the crowded salon. As though confronted by a hundred eyes, the girl had withdrawn her hand upon the music's ceasing.

'Don't you like me to take your hand?' he said quite low.

Silence.

'If you don't answer me, I shall kiss it.'

'Oh,' hurriedly; 'I do—like——'

'Then why did you draw it away?'

'I don't know.'

He smiled, but reflectively. Such an answer from any other young woman would have been eminently satisfactory. But here he was vaguely haunted by the sense of uncertainty inspired in such a man by contact with the virginal mind—a thing, for its brief hour, to be smiled at. But a little unwilling wonder remains after the smile is gone. No matter of morals his hesitation to make the first rent in the veil—purely a matter of the nerves, more sensitive than the rigidly virtuous give credit for.

'Are you going to be very nice if—when I come to England?'

'Haven't I been nice here?'

'No.'

'When was I not nice?'

'When you hide your hand—when you frighten me.'

'It isn't nice of *you* to laugh at me.'

'Laugh! I'm far too scared.'

She frowned a little and tried to draw away her fingers again, but he held them fast, 'Don't you realize how different you make me?' he asked.

"Different" from what you are with——' She shrank from naming the great lady he was so notoriously neglecting.

While she hung hesitating to the uncompleted sentence, the ante-room door opened softly, and the Gräfin von Hartung came out, followed by one of the men from the French Embassy. She had said good-night at half-past ten on the excuse of going home early to an invalid sister. Now at twenty minutes past eleven, she was running lightly down the stairs with her new cavalier at her heels.

Kitty was more glad than ever that she had eschewed the little room—not out of consideration for the Gräfin—but (from that instinct that was a passion with her) to keep her own most radiant story on a different level.

'Well, I said you made me different. And you——'

'I am wondering if you meant "different" from what you are with Gräfin von Hartung?'

'Well, yes,' he said, amused.

'I hope so.'

He laughed outright at her emphasis. 'Don't you like her?'

'I don't like the way she—no, she isn't very nice, but neither am I to be saying so to you.'

'She's an outrageous flirt. Is that what you mean?'

'Don't let us talk about it.'

'But I am interested.'

'In her?'

'In your view of her. What does she do that isn't what you call "very nice"?''

'Please don't ask me.'

'But I do.'

'Oh, *you* know,' said Kitty in distress, 'you know what she's like, better than most.'

'Yes, I know all about her,' he said rather seriously, 'but I'm not sure just what is in your mind. You *must* tell me.' He held her by 'must.'

'The Gräfin—I *can't* say it.'

'Is there *anything* you can't say to me?' he asked audaciously.

In her heart she answered, 'No, there was nothing—should be nothing.' But aloud: 'Please don't ask.'

'Yes, tell me. What is it that you've heard that Gerda has——'

Very low the awful truth came forth. 'She has let somebody—a man—kiss her.'

'You mean Monsieur de La Ferté Beaujon?' His air of relief was puzzling. 'How do you know?'

'No, not M. de La Ferté. I mustn't tell you who it was.'

'Oh, very well.' He spoke so lightly she felt obliged to add:

'But they are not engaged.'

'So!'

'Yes.'

'You find that very dreadful?'

She stuck her little chin in the air. 'Very like Natalie.'

'Who is Natalie?'

'My maid.'

'Ah—like your maid.' He got up. 'Lady Peterborough——'

'Yes, yes, come.'

Lord Peterborough was saying good-night to the Principessa

and her party at the door. Anton fell in with an arrangement she proposed for the end of the month. 'But you can't,' said Kitty, as they went on through the throng,—'there won't be time.'

'Time for what?'

'To go to her place in the Apennines before you go home, and still be in England by——'

'Oh, I see,' he laughed and looked over her head.

Misery came swooping down upon the girl. Oh, how long the great room was, and Lady Peterborough was at the far, far end. They made slow progress, stopping to speak to this one and to that. Presently, as they were going on again.

'Don't you think it's rather hard on me?' she said quite low.

'What?' He turned his broad shoulder and faced her.

'To be *made* to tell you something, and then have you offended!'

'I'm not offended,' he was going on.

'Yes,' she said wretchedly; 'you are quite different since I was so rude as to say that about your cousin. I wish you'd forgive me. To-night. Now.' Again he glanced back at her. 'Don't make me wait till you come to England,' she implored.

Tears would probably have spoilt her—the threat of tears made her eyes wonderfully tender. She really was very beguiling, he acknowledged to himself. 'I wasn't the least offended,' he repeated, but this time he stopped, and leaned his broad back against a marble pedestal that obstructed their way.

'Oh. Were you only shocked? It was very tactless of me to tell you.'

'Poor Gerda,' he said—which was natural enough, but he chuckled unaccountably.

Lord Peterborough descended upon them and carried the Prince away.

When he came half an hour later to say good-night, and *au revoir* to Kitty, he could not forbear adding under his breath: 'So it is understood?'

'What?'

'That you are to be very nice to me in England. It's only on that condition I come. Remember how patient I've been in Rome.' (That was it, then, patience.) 'But I warn you—I shall not be patient in London.'

Lady Peterborough's change of plan, which brought her party back to London on Wednesday instead of Saturday, was not known to Colonel Dereham.

Kitty's sole idea in not telegraphing to him, was that she might lead up, by a happy surprise in forestalling their reunion, to the glorious news of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein's coming. For her father must be a little—just a little—prepared for that great Coming—not to England alone, but visibly into his daughter's life.

Towards her god-father in this connection, Kitty was conscious of a vague sense of chill, not Lord Peterborough's fault exactly. He did not really know the man, of all men, best worth knowing. He had been absorbed by that matter of the acquisition through Giovanelli of a priceless Florentine Missal. In any case, Lord Peterborough was not, after all, near so close to the great matter as Kitty's father. She would go direct to Hill Street from the station, in spite of her god-mother's sniffing and the maid's glum looks. 'I shall not stay long,' she said consolingly to the unrecovered Natalie, whose sufferings in the Channel had reduced her to speechlessness. She was left humped in the hansom corner with closed eyes, while Kitty sprang lightly out on reaching the little house in Hill Street. Before she could ring the bell a new man-servant opened the door in the act of lifting a whistle to his lips.

'Is my father—Colonel Dereham in?'

'Y-yes'm—he is just going out.'

When the man recovered from his surprise the girl had glanced into the little library, and not finding her father there, had flown upstairs and opened the drawing-room door. Colonel Dereham and a lady were apparently taking leave of each other. He dropped her hand, gaping at the apparition.

'My child! what has happened?'

The belated blast of the hansom whistle ascended shrill.

'Only that I am home again.' Her warmth dropped many degrees. She spoke with a nervousness unusual to her. 'They've made some blunder about the new ball-room decoration. We came as soon as Lady Peterborough heard. She is very angry.'

'She would be,' he laughed, but oddly, Kitty felt.

The strange lady had been simply staring. She was a picturesque creature—too picturesque, the girl felt vaguely. More ex-

perienced eyes than hers would have seen that without rouge and pencilling the lady would have been handsomer, but less observed. She wore a great deal of barbaric-looking jewellery. Lumps of dull turquoise, chains of uncut emeralds fell over the elaborate embroidery of a Paris gown. Her cart-wheel hat would have graced a garden-party, and put the flower-beds to shame. Kitty had never known anyone just like this. Why did she seem in some way familiar, as with a manner combining the uncertain and the overbold, she advanced, diffusing strong scents?

Ah, that was what it had been that had met Kitty at the threshold. It was a perfume that she had sometimes noticed and vaguely wondered at before. She had once accused her father of using it. He in turn accused a new soap.

‘Won’t you present me to Miss Dereham?’

‘Ah—oh, I beg your pardon. Mrs. Heathcote.’

‘How do you do?’ She had taken the girl’s hand. ‘This is a moment I’ve looked forward to. I used to hear about you in India, and be shown pictures of you, when you were a little girl.’

‘And I,’ Kitty forced herself to say, ‘I have heard how kind you—you all were to my father when he was so ill.’

‘It was very little to do for an old friend. But now that you and I have at last met, let us see something of one another.’

‘I—I should be very glad.’

‘The hansom, sir,’ said the new servant at the door.

‘Your hansom is here,’ repeated Colonel Dereham to his visitor, in a higher key, as one speaks to the slightly deaf.

She looked at him, looked strangely, the girl thought.

‘I will leave you two to arrange a meeting,’ she said. ‘Good-bye,’ and Kitty’s father was conducting her downstairs, with some precipitancy.

Left alone, she walked about, looked at the cards of invitation stuck in the Adam mirror—cards that bore names conveying nothing to the girl. She had a returning sense of the strangeness of this whole life, so near, yet so unknown. What were they like, these Colonels and Captains and their wives? How unnatural to have so little share in her father’s friendships! How wrong to be so self-absorbed! With a pang she once more noted the bare unlived-in look, that makes most men’s rooms so unnecessarily touching to the feminine mind. For the average man is happily

unconscious of the uncomfortable aspect a room may wear, that yet is supplied with all the things that he counts needful.

‘Poor father!’ the girl whispered, and with an extension of sympathy—‘What an awful friend he’s got, too! It *is* bad luck to owe gratitude to a woman like that! How little I’ve thought of him all these happy days! I must make it up’—and she turned to Colonel Dereham on his reappearance, too full of new solicitude and reproached affection, to take note of the curious half-dogged, half-appealing look that darkened the handsome face—or its lighting on the instant she said: ‘Dear, I’m so glad at last to have seen Mrs. Heathcote. Did you ask her to dine with us on Sunday?’

‘No. Not Sunday.’

‘When?’

‘I didn’t ask her at all.’

‘But you will.’

He took the girl by the shoulders and looked at her caressingly, yet still with that effect of dumb appeal. ‘You certainly don’t seem to be the worse for your journey.’

They sat down on the sofa, and she told him odds and ends that might amuse him, knowing now that this would not be the occasion for the great unburdening—besides, the butler had said he was going out. She must not feel hurried when she told him her story.

He looked older. Had that been coming slowly? Only now, in this strong light and after—was it only fatigue or had it been emotion?—only now did she see quite plain the first hint of the pinch at the nostril, the discoloration under the eyes, and where was his fine colour? It had been going this last year. Now suddenly it was gone!

‘Are you ill, dear?’ she asked presently, laying her arms about his neck.

‘Ill? No. What put that in your head?’

‘Your eyes look ill.’

‘Oh, a little headache.’

‘—and you are’—she suppressed ‘yellow’—‘your nice fresh colour is gone.’

‘Youth’s a stuff will not endure. Don’t forget that, my girl! Well, have you left your heart in Italy?’

She shook her head. Another time she would tell him how it was gone to the Riesengebirge, but she was flung back to-day upon the thought of him—his unshared life. What profit had he of his daughter? She came and went like a mere visitor. It was all wrong and she was to blame.

‘Father, I wish you would let me know some of your friends.’

‘Lady Peterborough doesn’t.’

‘She is not my mother. ‘I don’t want to be so outside your life. . . .’ (Such a little time left, too—she must make the most of these days before—) ‘I am willing to give up—to share—one of our dear Sundays. If you don’t ask Mrs. Heathcote I feel sure she’ll be hurt.’ He gave a queer short laugh. ‘Don’t you mind that? It’s very ungrateful if you don’t. He made no defence—no answer. ‘Suppose I mind.’

‘Oh, you have other things to mind.’

‘You know I’ve often asked you before—and we mayn’t *always* have the opportunity.’

‘Opportunity for what?’

‘To—for me to share your life.’

She blushed as he said, ‘Oh, ho!’

‘*Do* ask Mrs.—’ A curious look of repulsion in his face arrested her. ‘If not Mrs. Heath—’ She stopped again. It was almost as if he shrank from the name repeated on his daughter’s lips. ‘What were you meaning to do to-night?’—her eyes went back to the cards in the panelled mirror.

‘Nothing in particular.’

‘This Lady Wick—Wick! what a droll name!—is enchanted to know you will come.’ She read the words written in the corner of the card.

‘Oh, I hadn’t really made up my mind.’

‘Then do, and take me.’

‘It wouldn’t amuse you.’

‘I’m sure it would! I should so *love* it, if sometimes we did things together.’

While he said, ‘Not this, I think,’ she saw he was considering.

It would immensely flatter Lady Wick if he brought his daughter to her party. She was always begging him. . . . Kitty recognised the look in the weak, handsome face that meant yielding, and she patted his hand.

'That's beautiful. I must go now or Natalie will be a deader. Why do you suppose servants are always worse travellers than we are?' But she did not wait for Colonel Dereham's views. 'I'll call for you at ten.'

'You'll get into trouble with Lady Peterborough.'

But Kitty danced away. 'Be ready at ten, Sir.'

'Tell me about our hostess,' she said gaily as they drove to Hans Crescent.

'Oh—a—she hunts. Place in Leicestershire.'

'Is there a Lord Wick?'

'Sir William. No one but the Queen has ever seen Sir William, they say. The Queen—and of course Lady Wick.'

'Oh why did the Queen see him?'

'She had to when she knighted him.'

'Why was he given his knighthood?' Kitty asked, thinking as she always did, it was the most beautiful-sounding rank in the world. Even to that day, given England's venerable Queen to strike the deserving shoulder with a sword, 'to be made a Knight' had a marvellous fine ring about it. 'What had he done to deserve the honour?'

'Happened to be Mayor of his town when the Queen passed through.'

Lady Wick stood receiving her guests in a merciless white satin gown, which set off with uncalled-for vividness the hues of a visage dyed in wine and wind. Hers was one of those complexions in which a general effect of high colour is harshly gained, not by the equal diffusion of swift blood, but by the tracery on the skin's surface of a multitude of tiny threads of scarlet, which seem at a distance to merge into an even flush of colour. She grew purple with gratification and excitement, when she caught sight of Colonel Dereham and his daughter, and forthwith gave Kitty her first experience of being vulgarly lionized. What odd people there are in the world, she reflected, a little bewildered, as she was passed round like a cake basket at a country tea. If these people had less manners they certainly had more 'manner' than those Katharine commonly encountered. It struck her these guests of Lady Wick's took more pains, were more deliberately vivacious and 'entertaining.' The young men were rather like

Marshall and Snelgrove's young men—very elegant. The ladies—she saw her god-mother describing them with a single portentous look, and so consigning them to unplumbed deeps. The thought stirred the girl's antagonisms. The ways of Peterborough House were perhaps not much to boast of. The cousin with whom Kitty's schooldays had been passed at Auteuil, Madame de Courcelles, would find them boorish enough.

Now she was being presented, in passing, to a keen looking young man. His eyes had followed her ever since her entrance, despite his attention being claimed by a loud young woman with a dashing air. He, however, took the introduction to Miss Dereham less to heart than the rest, who had all, more or less, made her little speeches. This man merely nodded and continued unabashed his silent appraisal.

'Oh, and here's Major Whitney!' this from the hostess in a tone that dismissed the dark young man as effectually as Lady Peterborough could have done—presenting instead a truly worthy object in the Major. 'He would never have forgiven me while life lasts if I failed to present *him*! Miss Kitty Dereham.'

How dare she call me Kitty! The girl bowed distantly, and turned her head to look in the crowd for her father. 'You know Colonel Dereham of course,' Lady Wick was saying. 'No?' she lowered her voice. Kitty, as she scanned faces, profiles, backs of the encompassing crowd, heard again explanatory fragments. 'Yes, of the 17th—Simla—The Peterboroughs—Sargent's picture——' And again, she met the look of the dark young man fixed full upon her. There were many eyes turned towards the girl, but these arrived. Kitty found herself exchanging glances with them, as Lady Wick raised her tired voice with shrill vivacity: 'Now, Major, since you're a man of prowess you may hew a way for Miss Dereham into the next room. There'll be music presently, and Tommy is there. He's simply dying to know Miss Dereham.'

'Let him perish. I shall keep Miss Dereham here,' returned Major Whitney with a facetious air.

'Oh, Major! Major!' Lady Wick screamed with delight as she hurried back to the door to meet a new batch of arrivals.

Katharine turned her back on the gallant soldier. 'I wish

there were such a thing as a chair,' she said to the young man with the eyes.

'Where do you want it?' he answered without budging.

'Plenty of chairs in the next room,' said the Major over her shoulder. Katharine looked steadily in front of her.

'You want to sit down here?' demanded the dark young man.

'Somewhere here,' she said with a frown as the Major's voice still urged, 'Music and plenty of chairs in the next room. "Tommy's" there too, as you've heard. And now you won't doubt that I'm the most unselfish man in the Service—your service, Miss Dereham.'

But Kitty was watching the quick turn of the black head in front of her, the rapid tour of the long eyes, that look of resourcefulness as unmistakable in a drawing-room as in ship or workshop. The dark young man shouldered his way a few paces and, looking back, made a sign—a funny imperious little motion of the head. Kitty hesitated. The Major's voice decided her. She was following the dark young man through the crush. He was elbowing his way with as little haste as civility, drawing attention to his requirements with a quiet: 'One moment please.—Yes.—Let me through, will you?'—and he removed a pretty girl with as little concern as he 'shifted' a fat old man.

'Here,' he had cleared a little island in the crush, and drawn into it a small divan that had been pushed under a curio table.

'You *have* got sharp eyes!' laughed Kitty as she gratefully appropriated the seat. 'I'll just sit here a moment till that Major man——' She apologized for her action more to herself than to her new acquaintance, standing guard, like a beef-eater before the throne.

'Oh, the Major's all right—very good officer.'

Kitty made a little face, and rested her chin in her hand, elbow on knee.

'You're tired!' announced the beefeater.

'I crossed from Boulogne this morning.'

'I crossed from Calais yesterday.'

'Oh, have you been in Italy too?'

'No, Vienna.'

'I don't know Vienna.'

'Neither do I.'

'How is that?'

'I've been working there.'

'At what?'

'Science.'

'Stand more so,' she commanded, motioning with her fan.

Instead of obeying, he said 'Why?'

'Because I don't want Lady Wick to find me and tell any more people that I'm——' She shrugged.

'That you're what?'

'Oh, it's bad enough once all round,' she said, laughing. 'Nobody can be told twice who anybody is. Not that I blame anyone for forgetting. I've come to a point of tiredness myself where I can't listen to names.'

'Yes, I saw that.'

'Saw what?'

'That you didn't hear mine.'

'What is it?'

"'Nobody can be told twice,'" he quoted.

'Oh, very well. I won't tell you who I am.'

'I knew who were you when you came in.'

'How did you——'

But he kept her to the point. 'What has Lady Wick been telling people about you?'

'Oh, nothing,' said the girl, with a sudden resumption of discretion.

'You began to say?' he persisted.

'I think not.'

'Yes, you did.'

This young man is odder even than the other odd people. Kitty considered the face, which she found rather striking, and his impossible manners even more striking than his face. Highly unlikely that she should have met him before, unlikely too that she should have forgotten. But she asked:

'Did you say you knew me?'

'Yes.'

'Where was it?'

'What?'

'That we met.'

'I didn't say we had met. I said I knew who you were.'

'You've seen my picture?'

'I've seen you.'

'Where?'

'At the Opera—last year.'

'Oh, you go often?'

'Not here.'

'While you've been abroad?'

'Yes.'

'Then you do know something about Vienna after all.'

'The University and the Opera, that's all I saw.'

'You care about music?'

'No.'

'No? Why do you go——?'

'Because the row puts other things out of my head.'

'Row! You mean the music?' she laughed, delighted.

'Yes,' he said quite gravely. 'When I've been working at the same thing for seventeen hours, I can't always get my mind to leave off. But a lot of banging does it.'

While Kitty was laughing, he went on: 'I used to drink beer.'

'——and now you go to the Opera.'

He nodded. 'Music's just as fuddling at the time and not so unsatisfactory next day.'

'Oh, what a nice conversation we are having—don't let Lady Wick find me.'

'I could come and see you.'

'Oh! could you?' His audacity took her breath!

Instead of answering, Katharine stood up and caught sight of her father. She made him a sign.

'Let's see, it's Peterborough House, isn't it?' said the persistent voice at her side.

'No, Hill Street,' answered Katharine, as she joined her father. Deliberately she gave no number.

On her way home, feeling that her comments on Lady Wick and Major Whitney had not given satisfaction: 'Father dear, I *like* your friends,' she said. 'They're so—so——'

'So what?' asked Colonel Dereham with an unusual edge in his mellow voice.

'So—different.'

'Different from what?'

'Why, from everyday people.'

'They may not be exactly like the people *you* see every day.'

'Oh, no,' the girl admitted frankly, 'not a bit.' Her father's silence admonished her. 'Your . . . Lady Wick's people are much more . . . original.'

'H'm.'

'That man that's been studying science abroad——'

'Which was that?'

'I forget his name.'

Really that young man was—*what* was he?

Different, any way.

Too 'different' even for Hill Street.

CHAPTER V

THE drawing-room was full of people when on Sunday afternoon, to the surprise of everyone but Kitty, Prince Anton came in. He seemed scarcely to see the girl. Lady Peterborough masked most of her enormous content at his appearance, knowing that the best way to make sure of seeing a good deal of such a person, was not to make too much of the circumstance. Not only the Prince, but his friend and secretary the old Freiherr von Dewitz, principal member of the small and economically ordered suite, spent most of their time at Peterborough House. They dined and drove with her much-diverted ladyship, they sat in her box at the Opera.

Just before he went away that first Sunday:

'You are looking very well pleased,' Prince Anton said to Kitty, 'to be back in London.'

The girl smiled. 'Do you think it's that?'

'What else?'

'I can't imagine.' And then they both laughed. In spite of Lord Peterborough joining them at that moment, Katharine went on: 'You are pleased too, aren't you?' Turning to the old man: 'We are saying it's good to be back in London.'

Instead of continuing in the same vein, 'Still, I don't deny,' said the Prince, 'I'd rather be in the country at this time of the year.'

Was that for the intruder's edification, thought Kitty, wondering.

'Where for preference?' Lord Peterborough was asking, 'Waldenstein?'—but simultaneously with the answer 'N-no, not Waldenstein,' Lady Algy was at his elbow, stiffly claiming fraternal attendance to her carriage.

'Why not Waldenstein?' Kitty asked.

'Because there are places more . . . One of my cousins and I have a little shooting-box in Hungary——'

'You don't get any sport this time of the year, do you?'

'Not shooting, but it's at its best in other ways just now. I can see you there.'

Ah, that was what he meant—away from all these people—he and she alone——

'What is Waldenstein like?' she asked.

'Waldenstein? Oh, Waldenstein is an ugly barrack—except an old bit.'

'When was the old bit built?'

'Twelve hundred and something. But the shooting-box . . . you'd like that.'

* * * * *

It was during an entr'acte in the *Bohème* that Kitty, refusing to her eyes the bliss of turning and exchanging looks with the man who sat at the back of the box, behind Lady Peterborough, leaned on the railing and fixed her gaze on the tier above.

A face was bending over, apparently looking intently into the Peterborough box. People did that more than ever since Anton had taken to sitting there. Even from the Omnibus box, royal eyes wandered thither and seemed to forget the way back. But this face looking down from above—as she glanced up a second time the man bowed. Katharine looked over her shoulder, and right and left into other boxes, to see for whom the bow was meant. No one but herself seemed to notice.

Again looking up, again she met the downbent look, and again the recognition. She picked up her glass. Why, of course. It was Lady Wick's dark young man, who had said that 'the row' at the Opera rested him after his long hours of study. Kitty smiled and he nodded again. Going out she saw him in the lobby, and laughed as she caught his eye, remembering the ground of his patronage of Covent Garden. He must be studying very hard just now. He seemed to need a great deal of relaxation. He was always there—always in the same place, and always staring down into the Peterborough box. If he ever looked at the stage Kitty certainly never caught him in the act. She would smile and nod; and when she was specially happy, she smiled and nodded more than once. Life was so extremely

gay, why not? It was even a relief to be able to smile and nod at some one a long way off, since one might not look at the man behind Lady Peterborough's chair, or if at all, so dreadfully discreetly. And the dark young man was always in the lobby when they came out—and Kitty, yes, she did rather make eyes at him. Life was so extremely gay.

Several times as she was driving in or out of St. James's Square, she had passed and was recognised by the young man who seemed of late to have much business in that part of town. He took his constitutional in the Park, too, of a morning. Kitty had got into the way of looking out for him as she raced up and down the Row. Flying by, she would make him a gay little sign, partly out of happy morning spirits, partly just to see the face light up.

But he was growing bolder. He stood to-day by the pillar-box at the corner of St. James's Square, pretending to write on a card before posting it, and deliberately watching her being handed into the carriage after her god-mother, by the Prince. He had smiled when he first caught sight of her; now he was frowning.

'Who is that with the Dark-Lantern face?' Lady Peterborough demanded.

'I don't know his name.'

'Why do you nod to him then?'

'Oh, he's a friend—an acquaintance, at least, of my father's.'

The young man had posted his card. In the act of going slowly on, he stopped and drew out his watch.

Seeing Kitty's eyes still on him, 'He walks like a shopkeeper,' said Lady Peterborough, dismissing him.

'—or a student,' corrected the girl, 'and that's what he is!'

Then Lady Peterborough spoke of the stamp of the English public school, and Waldenstein and the Freiherr of the fine effect of militarism even upon the civilian. And now they were off. Lady Peterborough, unfurling her brilliant parasol, looked out upon the world contented, calm, like an Eastern idol beneath its canopy. The Prince sat back in the carriage like a King on his throne, and the Freiherr looked more a Field-Marshal than ever, and the June sunshine filled the world, and everyone was happy—unless, maybe, the dark young man, who wasn't going to Hurlingham this glorious afternoon. The girl looked back; he

was doing the same, standing stock-still, watch in hand, staring after the carriage. Kitty smiled. The young man smiled. Ah, that was well—now *all* was well, with all the world.

It was the day of the great Polo match, and Hurlingham was surely one of the brightest spots upon all the shining globe. They passed a drag full of people they knew. Blanche Weare waved a pink parasol, and a young man called out that they must join forces on the grounds.

A mail phaeton went flying by, the young Duke of Worcester driving, with—why, it was Mary Lattimer on the box beside him.

‘They are engaged! You may depend upon it, they are engaged,’ said Lady Peterborough in the tone of one who has lost something,—‘and even so, I don’t know what the Lattimers are thinking of to let Mary—— Oh, here’s her mother behind, in a victoria, with the other girl. Still, before the thing is announced—well, the world is changing.’

‘Why, it’s almost like a race-meeting,’ said Waldenstein, his eyes wandering with interest over the throng.

Certainly everyone wore the prettiest possible things, the whole place blossomed into colour, and shimmered with movement and laughter. On their way to the Polo ground Lady Peterborough turned back to speak to Lady Lattimer and hear her worst fears confirmed. The best match in England, too! Meanwhile Prince Anton was saying aside to Kitty: ‘I’ve something to show you; we must sit together.’

‘Yes.’

‘You’ll manage it?’

‘I? I’m afraid I don’t know quite how——’

‘Don’t you think you could manage to get lost?—I mean just separated a little from your party; then I’d come to find you?’

Kitty, laughing, shook her head. It was the kind of enterprise she had no skill in. But the instigator, undaunted, seemed to have proposed to the Freiherr a plan of action less simple, perhaps, but calculated to achieve the same end. The Secretary kept close to the girl’s side, till after the seating was arranged to suit Lady Peterborough; herself and Prince Anton in two places that had been kept for her in the middle of the front row, Kitty not very far off under the wing of the old Freiherr. But all at once this

gentleman seemed to be consumed with a desire to hold converse with Lady Peterborough, in whose favour until this hour he had stood high. Leaving Kitty planted there near the end of the row, he made his way to Lady Peterborough. The space between the front places and the low guard that marked off the onlookers from the grounds was not great. But there he stood in everybody's way—or bound to be so in a moment when the match began—stood and talked to Lady Peterborough with great volubility, until Anton sprang up and said almost impatiently: 'You'd better sit here—I'll get another place,' and before remonstrance could be made effectual he was at Kitty's side.

The girl was standing up, shading her eyes and looking across the vivid green of the Polo ground, to see if that was Bertie Amherst on the restive roan pony. A light wind fluttered the pale green ribbons on her white hat, and tossed out the ends of her lace scarf. All about her was sunshine and a soft shimmering movement—the dumb laughter of glad things without a voice.

'Do you know what you are like?' the Prince said. She turned with a smiling question in her eyes. 'When I looked round and saw you standing here in this wonderful light, I knew instantly what it was you made me think of. You are like a silver birch.'

'I'm glad my white gown——'

He was smiling too: 'Really the English colouring is something quite apart—and I *don't* mean the colour of your gown.'

"Silver birch" is very pretty, but I don't think it as good as Lady Peterborough's comparison. Wasn't it imaginative of her to say that young man's face was "like a Dark Lantern"?' .

'What young man's?'

'The one we passed in the Square. Didn't you notice?'

'I'm afraid I was too much occupied with a face that is fortunately little enough like a Dark Lantern.'

"*Like a Dark Lantern*"! she repeated; 'it's a phrase that sets you thinking—expecting—makes you feel such wonderful possibilities—you think of a great shining that may spring out any moment from behind the shuttered dark.'

'I don't like dark faces. I'd rather think of one as fair'—his eyes were like kisses on her brow and lips—'I think I never in

my life saw anything so—why, you are as fair as moonlight.’ The fairness was blotted with sudden colour as the girl sat down.

‘Now they’re beginning. Look! that’s Bertie. Did you ever see anyone ride so well?’

But Anton still stood there with his back to the polo, and his eyes on the girl.

‘I’ve given you your name. You must find one for me.’

‘You must sit down,’ said Kitty, ‘everybody else is sitting down.’

‘When the silver birch has told the name of the other tree.’

She looked up at the tall straight figure. For all the throng about them, he stood alone. The sun was in her eyes. She narrowed them like one descrying something on the far horizon. ‘You are like a poplar in a plain,’ she said.

And then, although laughing he sat down, instead of watching the spirited game in front of them, they talked on. He got out of her the not easily ascertained fact that she not only loved poetry, but tried to write it. She was committed to show him something. Good heavens! how might that be! It was all about *him*. ‘I shan’t be able to, after all. I couldn’t, before Lady Peterborough. . . .’

‘Bring something to show me to-morrow in Kensington Gardens. I’ll be there at twelve, near the——’

‘Oh, I don’t see how we could do that.’

‘Why not? What is the advantage of being out of Germany if one mayn’t have a little freedom?’

Kitty had been thinking only of herself. She felt reproached. ‘You don’t have freedom at home?’ she asked.

He shook his head. ‘Everybody knows everything one does, and a great deal one hasn’t done. Nobody realizes anything about the rapture of privacy who hasn’t lived in a little German Court.’

‘Tell me about it. What is it like at Waldenstein?’

‘I’ll tell you anything you like to-morrow, in Kensington Gardens.’

‘Really I—I don’t think it’s a thing we can do. You had something to show me.’ She changed the subject a little hurriedly, like one afraid of it. ‘What was it?’

‘I’ll show it you in Kensington Gardens.’ Then, as she said

nothing, he went on: 'This isn't what I mean, but I got this for you in Rome . . . zum Andenken.' He drew out of his pocket a heart-shaped reliquary, delicately wrought and enamelled. 'Promise me you'll wear it . . . always.'

'How beautiful! Yes, I'll wear it . . . always.'

She hung it on her long chain and hid it in her gown, while the light wind played with her loosened scarf. It wavered like a fleecy cloud across the Prince's face.

'Oh, I'm sorry.'

'Don't hold it down in your lap—let it—the scarf is saying *danke schön*.' Although she had not thanked him for his gift, her whole heart sang thanksgiving.

'All my life I shall remember what the world was like to-day,' she kept thinking, as she sat looking out across the green expanse at the mad game going on. Men riding like the wind, leaning far out of their saddles, and with a slender stick, by some gay miracle, conjuring a ball from out the grass, and with a gallant gesture sending it flying, flying, like a little white bird, up into the blue and far across the green.

The very ponies were playing the game with the same mad zest as the men, plunging after the swift white speck, dashing into one another, turning sharply, darting, dancing about the goal—a far white gleam like a flower in the grass.

Oh, it would be fun to watch the ponies, if there were not so much in the world beside!

Oh, the band playing, and the laughter and the summer in the blood!

'Whatever comes—I shall have had to-day——'

A sudden cry and movement, and then no more laughter.

'What is it? What has happened?'

'One of the men is down.'

'Who?'

'Amherst,' voices said about them, and people stood up.

'Oh, poor Bertie!' Kitty was on her feet.

Philip Craybourne had pressed forward to see better. 'That's all right. They've stopped his pony. Then, catching sight of Kitty Dereham's face: 'They're always smashing their collar-bones, those fellows. It's nothing serious.' As Kitty still stood staring at the men who were carrying Bertie off the field, Cray-

bourne added with an edge in his voice: 'Some very good playing was wasted on you to-day. But I'll tell Bertie the part of the game that interested you.'

It was plain to see that Lady Peterborough was annoyed—and plain to those who knew her, that the cause was not Bertie's broken collar-bone.

She was almost short with the Prince, and she was distinctly snubby to the Freiherr.

'Then since we can't be of any use to you about Mr. Amherst, you must at least be free of any need to think of us in your anxiety,' said Prince Anton, gaily advertising his resolve not to tarry long with anyone out of temper. The hostess demurred, but he assured her: 'Oh, Worcester will give me a lift back to town;' and he was off with the Freiherr at his heels.

'Perhaps they've quarrelled! Mary is not driving back with the Duke.' Lady Peterborough groped for consolation. But poor Bertie got soundly rated for his broken bone. And there was still wrath left to be expended upon Katharine, who was distinctly saddened at the summary leave-taking of the Prince.

'I want you to understand,' said her god-mother as they drove home, 'I won't have you making yourself conspicuous with Waldenstein.'

'I shouldn't like,' said the girl, 'to make myself conspicuous with anybody.'

'*He* doesn't realize that a girl may suffer by having people staring as they did this afternoon.'

How they would stare if she were seen in Kensington Gardens—and yet it would be foretaste of heaven to walk with him there alone. But people wouldn't understand; they would say horrid things.

Why, there was that woman again in a hansom—the woman Katharine and Lord Peterborough had seen with her father's double. The face broke into smiles; the lady bowed. It was Mrs. Heathcote.

The girl was very silent the rest of the way home.

That night she sent a note to Prince Anton to say that she would not be walking in the Gardens the next day, but praying him to understand and to forgive her.

All the evening she sat waiting for an answer of some sort.

None came.

Meeting him, out of town, at the Prime Minister's garden-party the next day, Kitty seized a moment to make clear that, for all she did not accept the tryst, she understood how a man in Prince Anton's position must long for a little privacy. She showed herself so eagerly sympathetic with that point of view, that his first coldness to her melted.

'Nothing is worth having that all the world knows about,' he said in return, and began something, half laughing, about 'the vulgar eye,' when his hostess carried him off.

As Lady Peterborough was taking her leave, the Prince made opportunity to say to Kitty:

'You remember I am dining with you to-morrow.'

'You don't think I had forgotten.'

'Let me see,' he reflected, 'what was the hour?'

'It isn't dinner, it's only what Lady Peterborough calls "a cold collection" before "Tannhäuser."'

'I know. She said half-past six, didn't she?'

'Yes, half-past six.'

'Suppose I forget the precise time'—he lowered his voice—'and come a quarter of an hour earlier. Will you be down?'

'Oh yes.'

* * * * *

'Lady Peterborough has come in late. But she is dressing in a whirlwind,' Kitty greeted him breathless. He still held her hand. The girl tried to think quickly of something else to say, since he did not speak. 'What was it you were going to show me in Kensington Gardens?'

'You never came.'

'But you know how I wanted to.'

'People do what they really want to.'

'Girls can't.'

'Oh yes, they can. My faith in you is a little——'

'Don't say that.' She could easily have cried.

He lifted her hand and kissed it.

It comforted her vastly, though it was his habit. He kissed Lady Peterborough's hand too, she thought a little resentfully. But he did not let the girl's fingers go; while with the free hand he felt in his pocket.

'What I wanted to show you is only a foolish little photograph. He drew her to the sofa, still keeping her hand.

'What place is this?'

'Our shooting-box. These woods go on for miles—the river's just here.'

'It's charmingly pretty. Is there a picture of Waldenste in too?'

'No. This is the place I care about. You'd like it too. I see you there.'

He had said that twice.

Would the honeymoon be here?—was that his meaning? Surely, for the velvet voice went on:

'I'll tell you what the days would be like,' and behold she was in every hour! Easy for her inexperience to mistake German sentiment (no less excellent and beautiful for being a common possession among the Teutons) for a thing as rare and strange, as would be poetic effusiveness about woods and waters, in the mouth of a young Englishman to-day.

So he was a poet too, this Prince of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein, singer as well as soldier, like Montrose and Raleigh, like Sir Philip Sidney, and like that Lovelace who wrote to Lucasta on going to the wars, and from prison to Althea.

The girl sat in a golden dream listening to the tale of the hours told with extraordinary charm, albeit with an eye on the door. And she was there! at this place in Hungary; hidden in the forest; had seen the sun's uprising, and now, the day far spent, came riding at the Prince's side, out of the thick fir-wood, where already it was dusk, to find the little *châlet* still shining in the warm sunset. 'We would send the horses on before with the grooms,' he had said, 'and we would wait till they were out of sight. And then we take hands—and now we go home.' He bent down—nearer. He kissed her. She closed her eyes a second. 'And the best part of it all'—his breath was on her face—'we shall be so far from the prying world . . . quite hidden in the heart of the fir-wood.'

'Yes.'

'Could you be happy in a love that was everyone's property?'

'I never thought.'

'Of course you couldn't. It is spoilt the moment it is shared with others.' He drew away.

The mere thought seemed to chill him.

Or was it Lady Peterborough's coming along the hall?

* * * * *

Twice in the ten days that had followed the evening at Lady Wick's, Kitty had seen on the hall table at Hill Street, where seldom a visiting card appeared, one bearing the inscription

Mr. Garth Vincent,

and written underneath in pencil, 46 *Cavendish Square*.

'Who is your new friend?' she asked her father, taking up the second card, on Sunday night, as they went in to dinner.

'No friend of mine. Who is this?' he asked Gibbs.

Gibbs straightened his important back, and said: 'The gentleman asked for Miss Dereham, sir.'

Kitty's wide eyes disclaimed all knowledge of him. 'What did he want?'

'He didn't say, miss.'

'What was he like?'

'A dark gentleman he was, miss.'

'Old or young?'

'Young, miss, and——'

'Well?'

'Rather sharp-spoken, miss.'

'How sharp-spoken? What did he say?'

'He asked when you would be here.'

'That doesn't sound so very sharp.'

'No, miss, but he said it sharp. Asked me if you had got the other card. What had I done with it!' Gibbs' dignity was obviously ruffled at memory of the encounter.

Her father chaffed her unmercifully. This was evidently some friend she wanted to conceal from Lady Peterborough's lynx eyes. He wasn't sure that even an indulgent parent like himself could connive at——

She begged him in French not to say such things before a servant; she was not sure of Gibbs' sense of humour—perhaps she meant Colonel Dereham's.

Doubt of other qualities in her father was certainly gaining ground. Although she fought against these realizations—fought most of all against the vague mortification the name Heathcote

conjured up—her confidences had been checked. She had not told her father what she had meant to about the Prince, and the two men had not encountered. A meeting seemed difficult to arrange with only Kitty apparently desiring it, and Lady Peterborough so full of devices for entertaining the Prince in more festive fashion. They had gone off this afternoon to the second day's sale at the great Bazaar, held under royal patronage, and where Lady Peterborough had a stall, assisted by an army of pretty women.

Kitty, fighting against a depressing summer cold, was trying over the music of a song—though she had been allowed to stay at home for the express purpose of lying down, that she might be in better case for the dinner-party that evening and the ball to follow.

Six o'clock. She really must go away and rest now, or Lady Peterborough would find her there and scold her. The door opened. Heavens! Could she be back already?

The butler's voice: 'Mr. Garth Vincent.'

Why, that, the girl remembered, that was the name of the mysterious Hill Street visitor. Coming out from behind the piano screen, she found herself face to face with the dark young student, who had found her a seat at Lady Wick's crush, and shown his Dark-Lantern face so often since, about the Square and at the Opera. But why was he here?

'How do you do!' She shook hands, yet more dumbfounded to see the unexpected visitor regarding her with unsmiling, inquisitorial eyes.

'Why did you give me the Hill Street address?' he demanded without preamble.

'Why not?' she said, suddenly at sea.

'For the good reason that it isn't yours.'

'It *is* mine.' She faced him.

He simply looked at her. She felt her colour rise. His directness had wiped out the enormity of his own behaviour, in showing the insincerity of hers.

'My father's house is in Hill Street.'

'So are other houses—where you don't live.'

It was no use. She must tell the truth to this odd creature. 'I did it to—to save explanations.'

'Well, you see it hasn't saved them. It's brought me here.' He sat down.

Kitty stared at him, and then, clutching at her self-possession, said with dignity: 'I don't see people here that—that Lady Peterborough doesn't know.'

'Her not knowing me can be remedied whenever you like.'

Kitty began to laugh a little hysterically.

'Oh, dear, if she heard you!'

The contingency appeared to have no interest for him.

'Will you see me in Hill Street, as you said you would?'

'I didn't say I would'—she was quickly grave again—'and I can't.'

'Why not?' He leaned forward and fixed her with his curious eyes.

Kitty stood up. 'I think I must ask you, please, to go.' Still he looked at her with that intent expression, but not as if he had heard, and he remained seated. 'It will be better,' she said, 'if Lady Peterborough doesn't find you here.'

'Better for who?'

'Better for you.'

He leaned back in his chair.

'Even better for me,' she added on an impulse.

'Then come to Hill Street!' He was on his feet.

The impertinence of this young man! really, it took the breath.

'Why should you think I would do that?' the girl asked with heightened colour.

'You know why.'

(Was that his way of saying: You encouraged me—smiled, and made eyes—you know you did? *Oh!*)

'I know why? I beg your pardon——' Kitty held her head uncommonly high——. 'I don't know the least in the world.'

He was about to speak, as deliberately he sat down again. Something in his aspect made her nerves shrink at what might be coming. Hastily she flung up a barrier.

'It isn't worth discussing Hill Street or anything else, as I'm going away.' She saw his figure stiffen, as under attack.

'Where?'

'To—abroad.'

'When?'

‘Soon.’

‘How long do you stay?’ He was frowning at the floor.

‘I shall not come back—for some time.’

Kitty caught her breath when he lifted a heavy look. The long shining eyes were bloodshot.

‘When you do come back—you’ll see me?’ he said.

‘It will be quite impossible.’

The effect on him was of a kind to make the obscure nervousness that had seized her early in the interview, gain upon her—thrusting her rudely into a world radically different from the one, draped and garlanded, where she had lived these late enchanted days. Here suddenly was something not only bare, but raw and rather terrible. She repeated very gently: ‘It is quite impossible. You see, Mr. ——’

‘Garth Vincent is my name,’ he interrupted bitterly, ‘but I don’t see.’

She tried to speak, felt sorely her need of self-defence, remembering—the things *he* remembered, but found no word.

‘Then there’s nothing to hope for,’ he said.

‘Oh yes, yes, so many—other things.’

‘I’ve tried them all,’ he returned quietly.

‘You can’t have done that. You’re too young.’ Oh, if he would only go—— ‘There *are* other things’—he looked up—‘but’ . . . she was trembling unaccountably . . . ‘but they aren’t any of them here.’

‘Nor at Hill Street?’ he said with a curious persistence in the hope he had hugged for days.

‘No;’ at a look from him she added, ‘I don’t see how you could think——’

‘Oh yes, you do.’

A compliment in any other mouth, this implication of miracle-working charm. From this man’s lips the phrase fell like a whip. Humiliation rushed upon her, seeing in his face this further witness to those looks and smiles she had flung out in the fulness of an overbrimming joy—very much as at the Nice carnival, the winter before, she had tossed out of her carriage flowers and confetti aimed gaily at the bolder masques. But to dress her actions up in simile, was not to hide their ugliness. She *had* encouraged this impossible young man. Intoxicated with youth and

success, she had flirted with him, just as though she had been that horrid Hilda Carey or—oh *dear!* Well, she was reaping her reward in this difficult hour.

Quite suddenly he dropped his head in his hands, and sat so, for several seconds, with hidden face.

‘Please forgive me,’ she said, leaving much unsaid that was yet for once courageously recognised, amply admitted. ‘I’m sorry.’

‘No, you’re not.’

‘I am, I am.’

‘It’s a game you’ll often play.’ But he dropped his hands and stood up.

A noise in the hall. Mimi’s bark. Were they home from the Bazaar? From the swift excursion of the thought, her attention came back to the uncouth figure, awkward, wretched, angry yet halting there, like a creature too maimed to run. Katharine saw suddenly exactly how Lady Peterborough would view this unusual apparition in her drawing-room. As to the possibility of her god-mother knowing his errand—no, no! A hot shrinking filled the girl. And Anton! On the eve of becoming a Princess of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein here she was discussing with a young man of this sort——

‘Good-bye, Mr. Vincent.’ From leagues on leagues of distance: ‘I forgive you your rudeness and your——

‘My damned impudence.’

No waiting for reply. No other word. He was gone.

‘Who is that bounder?’ said Bertie, coming in.

CHAPTER VI

PEOPLE had begun to talk of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein's infatuation for the English girl. When he followed her to London, they inquired of everyone but Lady Peterborough, what on earth that old woman could be thinking of. Lord Peterborough shrugged, and said it was a question that he for his part never asked; but he watched Kitty with curiosity, not to say concern.

She herself was far from ignorant of the difficulties in her way. She held not only the current social views on the subject of rank, but held them emphasized, illuminated, by the little hole-and-corner historic sense, that found poetry and romance in the family history of a small portion of the community. If it meant much to her chivalry-loving soul to think of the Schloss built on the mountain crag by crusading princes of Waldenstein blood—if it was a fine and fitting thing that one's loves should come of a race of Kings—it was troubling too, if you yourself were otherwise descended. How, even in this astonishing age, when few things old stood firm, how get over the ancient barrier between blood merely gentle and blood royal! How was it to be done? for done it was to be. Not by her—Fate's affair. That thought alone made it possible to draw quiet breath.

There were elements in the situation that she knew she had not yet grasped. But these were not the things that would have afforded a more experienced mind food for cavil or for wonder. That Anton should plot and plan for hours to gain five minutes alone with her, seemed to the girl not to call for explanation in a lover. That since their secret understanding he behaved so differently to her, so indifferently almost, when others were by, although the fact wounded her pride, it was not to her thinking Anton's fault, but other people's. If the 'talk' had reached even

her ears, more no doubt had come to him. She had no difficulty in attributing his recent bearing to her before the world, to the accumulated irritation of a sensitive spirit, restive under the menace of the vulgar eye, intent on respite from the entailed publicity of a high position. Explaining so, things otherwise inexplicable, she held herself ready to aid and to abet him. A proposal to conceal a relation of this sort to any other man, would have stirred her critical sense, made her ask questions of herself and him. But with respect to Anton, temporary secrecy seemed a wholly natural imposition. While she would have shrunk from hiding the lover, she was ready to hide the Prince, considered that she perfectly understood the ground of his implied but unmistakable demand for silence. Of course he meant, till every detail should be arranged.

But he asked strange things of her—clandestine meetings that she did not even seriously consider, so impossible did they seem.

‘You don’t a bit understand,’ she said to him once, half laughing, half in tears. ‘Men are so ignorant.’

‘Oh, they are!’

‘Yes, of what’s expected of a girl.’ Then, as her quick spirit saw he was about to urge again, ‘One *can’t* do that!’

‘You’re not in France.’

‘One can’t go off and meet someone alone, even in England. People wouldn’t realize——’ She looked at him with changing colour. ‘I should have thought it wasn’t possible in Germany either.’

‘Oh, people like us do as they please.’

But he felt so little sure of his ground, that he hesitated, even, if the truth were told, a little in awe of the unsmirched soul of the girl. Too accomplished a squire of dames not to know that the art of love is the art of preparation, he nevertheless began to be restive at the passing of the days; at the shrinking dislike she showed of certain books he lent her, books of a distinct educational quality.

‘No, I didn’t like it, but’—half apologetically—‘I’m afraid I didn’t understand it very well,’ she said of a volume of perfervid poetry that he had counted on for its effect.

The last time that he suggested a way of meeting *unter vier Augen*, and she had only sighed and shaken her head: ‘But

we are so discreet,' he said, less by way of comment on the past than promise for the future. Not seeing that she wholly missed his meaning, he went on: 'We have been too long-suffering.'

'Dreadfully long-suffering,' she agreed.

'How long shall we be "suffering"?' but he had his laugh alone.

She was trying to find courage to make answer. 'Till——'

'Well?' he persisted, watching her.

'Till we set out for the shooting-box?' she hazarded, hot with blushes.

'Ah!'—he seemed to be thinking. 'Well—when is that to be?'

'When do you think?'

'It cannot be too soon.'

The words set all the world to whirling. 'There will be a good deal to do,' she said with a sense of breathlessness.

'Will there?'

'Well, you know girls have to have trousseaux and that kind of thing.'

'Oh, must they?' for all the world as though he had never heard of these commonplaces. Soon thereafter he took his leave.

Again and again, when about to make things clear, he caught himself up. There was an effect of something proud about the girl that held at bay—something, in spite of the romantic element in her character, that produced an impression of coldness. The virginal will have this effect upon the sensual man. It disquiets him. Often he will seek refuge from it in the opposite extreme.

And so one morning a note of farewell:

'I must report myself at Berlin.'

* * * * *

She wrote to him anxious, but trusting little letters, and got back tardy, non-committal answers that any eye might see. Without a doubt, Kitty thought, he was in some trouble, family or State. Being who he was, he was one of those few to whom no general rule applies. This thought was the key to her whole relation to him.

But, oh, the waiting was hard. Eight months dragged by.

She wrote to him, enclosing her latest photograph. Was

he going to Rome again this spring, or would London see him? And would he send her the long-promised picture of himself?

He would 'bring it,' came the glorious answer.

And in April he did. If he had had 'trouble,' no hint of it hung about him now. Nor yet about his picture, a delightful water-colour sketch doing the Prussian uniform gay justice, and the handsome face no less.

And he was just the same. No, more adorable—and again the sun shone and all the waiting and the Winter were forgot.

Just one cloud on the horizon that Kitty's eyes could see. Colonel Dereham was ill; certainly too 'seedy' at present to pay his respects to, or even to receive the Prince of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein. His old occasional headaches were grown chronic. There were times when the girl became a prey to fears too dark for formulating—days when he shut himself up and refused to see her, or even Mrs. Heathcote. For as time went on there was less ceremony about this friendship. But when he did reappear, although he sometimes looked ill enough, still he was usually cheerful, in his old light way, and his daughter would be reassured. He had an inveterate dislike to explanations, or any sort of soul-searching. If he resented the asking of questions, even by Kitty, he certainly seldom put them himself. The more striking, therefore, his unprelaced demand one day—

'When are you going to marry?'

'Why, I . . . I don't know.'

'Don't they ask you?—the idiots.'

'Not *all* of the idiots, father dear.'

'Humph! I know of three who do.'

'Do you?' a little wickedly; 'I wonder if I know them.'

'Bertie Amherst, Sir Philip Craybourne, and Hastings.'

'Oh, *those*——'

'Well, what are you waiting for? Aren't they splendid enough for you?'

'They aren't so very splendid.'

'They're three of the best matches in England.'

'Y-yes I suppose they are.'

'You're waiting to fall in love, I suppose.'

'Oh no,'—a little guiltily,—'I'm not waiting for that.'

‘For what then?’

She stood silent.

How could she say for what she was waiting?

‘I don’t think it will do you any good, Kitty’ (he was uncommonly serious for him)—‘to have people saying you are keeping up a desperate flirtation with Breitenlohe-Waldenstein.’

‘Do *you* hear people say so?’ Unconsciously her emphasis measured great distance, for the Heathcote woman held the farther end of the tape.

‘Well, they do. And it’s the second season they’ve said so. Won’t do you any good, my dear.’

Another time when some society paper reported at length a bal masque at Peterborough House, with a significant reference to Prince Anton and Miss Dereham as Lancelot of the Lake and the lily maid of Astolat: ‘I don’t know what that old Peterborough woman is thinking about,’ repeated Colonel Dereham with an ill-humour very unusual in the most amiable of men.

More to the point was what Lord Peterborough thought. For the first time in thirty years he precipitated a scene with his wife. It ended stormily. He would speak to Waldenstein. That threat reduced Lady Peterborough to terms. Let him wait for twenty-four hours. It was far easier to wait than to forge ahead. The huge effort had exhausted the old man’s scant energy. Yes, he would wait twenty-four hours.

He and Katharine avoided each other. She knew he disapproved of her, and he knew she knew. No need of words there.

But between Waldenstein and Lady Peterborough, a long conference behind closed doors.

Again after dinner she took him away to her boudoir to show him some of her new bindings. But almost at once a servant came to Katharine in the drawing-room: ‘Her Ladyship asks you, please, to bring her your book, miss—the book that came home from the binders yesterday.’

‘Which one? Oh, the Prosper Mérimée?’

‘Yes, miss,’ said the footman, relieved at not having to tackle the name. Kitty went with the volume in her hand to the pink and white room opening on to the conservatory. Only Anton was there. She hesitated on the threshold.

‘I had a message from——’

‘Yes, it’s all right.’ He drew her in and shut the door—looked at her a moment, coming closer as he did so, till suddenly he caught her to him. His action had the air of an overmastering impulse. Yet he was not so carried away but he could wonder, as his arms closed round her, where she got her flame-like uprightness—there seemed nothing firm enough in her physique to serve as framework for so tall, reed-straight a creature. She was one of those girls whose slender bones seem to lack hardness while they have elasticity. He laid a hand on her waist—absurdly small. Wrists so slight; and all so pliant. The youngness of her was like the youngness of a child. He kissed her.

‘Why did you leave me, if you love me like this?’ she whispered. ‘You’ve never told me why.’

‘It was because I loved you like this, that I left you.’

‘I don’t understand the least in the world.’

‘No, dear angel, of course you don’t. Dear, dear little innocent!’ He kissed the hand on his sleeve, lifted the other, took the green and silver book out of her grasp, laid it on the writing-table, and fell to kissing the small fingers that had held it, kissing them one by one. ‘But Lady Peterborough understands perfectly. Ah, that’s a clever woman. But then she knows the life. You see, my beautiful, there have been great difficulties.’ (Just as she had guessed!) ‘You can’t conceive what *huge* difficulties—Lady Peterborough realizes.’

‘Yes, yes,’ the girl protested, ‘I can understand all that better than you think.’

He had put her into a great chair and sat upon the arm, drawing her close against him. ‘Well, if you can understand, so much the better. It hasn’t been easy. Far from it.’

‘Dear Anton,’ she murmured. He had gone through harassing scenes at Waldenstein for her sake—perhaps, who knows, they are making him leave the army; even give up his rank! ‘Tell me about it,’ she whispered.

‘Well——’ but he fell to murmuring endearments in caressing German. Suddenly he got up and ran his white fingers through his upstanding brush of yellow hair. ‘I’m frightfully in love, you know,’ he said argumentatively. She smiled. Did he think it necessary to point that out? ‘They’ll say I’ve lost my head.’ (Poor Prince! to have even at this moment to think

of 'they.')

'My only defence is: I can't help it. C'est plus fort que moi. I can't let you go.'

'Of course not.'

'No, it isn't exactly "of course,"' he said, smiling; 'but I can't let you go.' Again he kissed her: brow, eyes, 'Mundwinckel.' 'But you'll understand and make things easy—help me all you can.'

'Indeed I will.'

'You won't forget that I've made great sacrifices for your sake——'

'I will never forget that.'

He stood directly under the electric light by the great green marble mantelpiece. His fine fresh-coloured complexion gleamed pink and satiny in the strong illumination; his hair looked like spun glass, and the defiant upturned moustache, catching the downward flooding light, seemed more metallic-golden than ever.

And he loved her—he was *her* knight, this splendid creature.

'The great thing (you'll agree with me in this, my beautiful) is to have no delay.'

'No.'

'And you—you'll like living in Hungary?' he asked, after a second's hesitation.

'I shan't mind where we live.' As he looked at her reflectively she added: 'But it would be delightful to be part of the year at Waldenstein, wouldn't it?'

'No,' he said with decision. 'It's no use to begin that——'

'Our English Princess is so seldom there.'

'But my mother is, always.'

'Won't she like me?'

Transported to the Waldenstein circle, he answered absently. 'She may not care about—about this kind of arrangement.'

The girl half rose. 'What is it you mean, what "arrangement"?''

'Why, a—what I'm proposing. A private marriage.' Something in her eyes made him add hurriedly: 'You said you could understand my position.'

'You—you mean "private" just for the present—till you are able to announce it?'

'My dear child, you see, unfortunately, you aren't—you have every grace except rank. We can't get over that.'

'Can't get over it?'

'No. And we, in Germany, are great sticklers for——'

'But you said—oh, what was it you said?—the great huge difficulties *were* got over. What did you mean? Please, please speak plain. I—it hurts me so dreadfully——'

She stood up, facing him with bewildered eyes.

'It's all right,' he said soothingly, with a hand out to bring her back; 'I shall always love you best.'

She drew away shaking with a sudden cold excitement. 'Does a private marriage with me mean——'

'Everybody will understand it's *all right*,' he repeated. 'Nobody will think any the less——. Why, it's been done in your own Royal Family.'

'You don't mean—Anton, *say* you don't mean I may live to see another woman your real wife.'

'If ever—probably never—in any case you would be my real wife, too.'

'Too! *Too?*'

Devil take the unlucky little word, he thought. It stung like a wasp.

She had shrunk back from it away, away to the middle of the room, with both hands up, barrier-wise, to shield her wound; and a pitiful young face looked over, only half crediting the extent of her hurt.

'Don't look like that?' he prayed; 'you make me miserable.'

As slowly, doubtfully, he came towards her with outstretched hand, his signet caught the light. Her wide eyes fixed upon it. Old words rose up above the chaos in her mind: 'Knight, thou hast done thyself great folly, for this shield ought not to be borne, but by him that shall have no peer that liveth.'

'——you make me miserable,' he was saying.

'I—I don't want to make you miserable "too."' Her voice was so faint, he was afraid she was going to fall. 'Don't,' she cried, shrinking, and with eyes still fixed on the ring, as though it carried an evil spell newly apprehended. 'I—I am "all right," as you've learned to say. Only I—— Oh, I wish I had died last night.'

She fled from the room.

'Prince Anton is downstairs.' Lady Peterborough stood at the foot of the girl's bed the next morning at eleven o'clock.

'I am not able to see Prince Anton.'

'To-night, perhaps?'

'No.'

'To-morrow?'

'Never again.'

The old woman leaning on the footboard half smiled. 'I suppose you know that Lady Hermione Vinton has found nothing to complain of in her position? And everybody receives and respects the morganatic wife of the Russian Grand Duke——'

'Please let Prince Anton be told I cannot see him again.'

'Oh, very well.' But she lingered. 'It would be a much more interesting life than being married to the average Englishman. . . . For a little cosmopolitan like you——' She was nearly at the door. 'It would have suited *me* much better, I know.' At the mere prospect she turned with renewed animation. 'If you played your cards reasonably well, who knows—the world is changing. What is wildly impossible to-day, is a matter of course in a few years' time.'

'Just tell me one thing;' the girl half sat up, her hair, that he had said was as fair as moonlight, falling all about her. 'What did he mean when he spoke of "difficulties," "great difficulties," that had been got over?'

'Why, that he was ready to offer you a private marriage. It means a great deal to a man like Anton. He is still as free as air. Life is very pleasant for such a person. He offers to lay many of its attractions aside. You would have a legal and understood claim. The tie would be fully recognised. The children——'

'Don't!' She covered her face with her hair.

'——they would be received and provided for. You too. You know you haven't a great deal of your own. I've told him your god-father would insist on a settlement——'

'He wouldn't agree!' she said through the shining tangle.

'He hasn't been asked yet.'

'Thank heaven for that!'

'But he has been busying himself. Whatever happens, he will have to be told. You had better get up and talk it over with——'

'No! I will never speak of it again.'

'Oh, indeed. Very well. What message shall I give Waldenstein?'

'Please give him my "good-bye."'

Prince Anton and Lord Falconbridge were giving a dinner-party at the Amphitryon that night. Lord Peterborough was not expected to lend countenance to these occasions. 'I will do many things for peace,' he had once said, 'but I will *not* eat my food in a restaurant while I have a dining-room of my own.'

So he would be alone to-night—unless Kitty—— She dragged herself up and dressed. When the gong sounded she went downstairs.

'Good little girl!' was the greeting, and they talked as though Kitty were in the habit of lying in bed a whole day, and it was a special grace in her to come down to dinner.

'Going to sing a little by-and-by?' he asked when they went into the drawing-room.

'No—not—not to-night,' and she turned away her head quickly that he might not see the sudden tears. It was better to leave her to herself, he decided. For his own part, he sat huddled over some reports of the Historical Society, withdrawing more and more from an unsatisfactory world into the depths of his great arm-chair. As though even there, feeling himself not safe, he seemed, in that way of his that Katharine knew so well, to be retiring inch by inch into his own linen. Only the ends of his fingers came out of his wide white cuffs. His neck and spine seemed to have drawn together like a closed accordion. Half-past nine. Kitty turned the pages of a very original novel—for they were all blank, those pages, save for a single name written across each one. 'Anton.' 'Anton.' Half-past nine. And here was the last post. Lord Peterborough had to come out of his retreat. One of his letters was hard to read, it seemed. He thrust out his neck, drew out his accordion spine, and you could see now how tall he would be standing. His letter must be very badly written. He turned his head sideways, with eye-glass eye directed full at the page, and looking rather like a suspicious cock interrogating a grain of maize. Muttering discontentedly, and holding the

paper now closer, now farther off, to get the proper focus, he went on tromboning with his letter.

Kitty laughed, leaned her head on her arm and burst into tears.

'Bless my soul, child! Don't do that!' He uncoiled himself and got up shakily. 'Tell me about it, little girl. I am your guardian, you know.' He dwelt significantly on the beautiful word. 'Don't think I look upon the office altogether lightly, nor from a point of view purely legal.' He waited a moment, standing before the crouched figure with the hidden face. He seemed to feel he must talk on to give her time for recovery. 'In a matter of greater moment than income and "settlements" I would "guard" you, little girl.'

He waited. She put out one hand from under the hidden face, took his, pressed it, and let it fall; her own as well, hanging limp at her side.

He drew up a little chair beside her and sat there waiting. 'Perhaps you think you can't talk freely to a dry old man.'

'Dear, if to anyone—to you,' the muffled voice said upon a sob.

'I know more about what you're going through than you think.' The only answer, the low sound of weeping. 'Yes, it is very bitter—but it would be less so if you realized the bitterness was certain to go. Go utterly. I know something about it.'

She lifted her tear-stained face. 'Did you ever——'

'Yes—yes.' He was looking past her at the light.

'You—cared?'

He nodded slowly.

'Hugely? Horribly much?' The prettiness of the face was suddenly distorted again and the tears streamed down.

But the old face smiled—tenderly, pitifully. 'We said that no man and woman had ever cared before—not as we did.'

She bowed her head and still wept on.

Presently she raised her face and dried it. Crushing her pocket-handkerchief into a moist little ball, she said in that cloudy voice that long weeping brings, 'You were young too?'

'About as young as—about twenty-eight.'

Anton was twenty-eight. 'But you were married then.'

'Yes, I was not free.'

'Oh-h.'

'It came too late; you see.'

‘Too late.’

They sat and looked before them.

When he saw the ball of handkerchief pressed again on her eyes, he went on with his task.

‘You don’t realize it, but it’s worse if it comes when you are—when you’re older. For then you have been saying to yourself that you have missed it—and suddenly at the eleventh hour here it is! Your gladness is chequered with a horror at remembering how near you had come to never finding it. You would think it was your last chance. We said all these things. Had our hours of mad revolt—of agonized acceptance.’

‘And then?’

‘Then? Oh, then we—we turned away from love to loneliness. Said, for honour’s sake (decency’s sake we’d call it to-day—but this was long ago, and we used noble words still, unabashed by the majesty of them)—yes, for honour’s sake we would make the sacrifice, lay our heads upon the block and die the death.’

Kitty leaned nearer and took his hand.

‘You suffered *together*,’ she said. He assented. ‘And you have that to remember.’

He seemed to agree. ‘The one thing that comforted us was that nothing could take memory away. Had we been destined to be happy, so our sorry comfort ran, we might (who could say?), in falling on the thorns of life—we might have cried out against each other, forgotten our love or done it some indignity. Now it was safe, because it lay wrapped in cerements. Not all the angels in heaven, we said, not God Himself, could take away what had been.’

A little pause.

He cleared his throat and in a different voice: ‘I haven’t thought of Honora for fifteen years.’

‘Oh!’

‘I call up her ghost to-night to point a moral anæsthetic. And so pale are memory and ghost, I may have summoned them in vain. Let them go back to sleep again, among the shades.’ His frail hands in the air dismissed them. ‘Your dream, little girl, will go to join my dream, and Dante’s and Abelard’s and a million more. And you will sit one day, as I do, trying to recover a twinge of the old anguish—and like me fail.’

CHAPTER VII

THE following summer, a marriage was announced between Prince Anton Friederich of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein, and the Duchess Margaretha, of Hildesheim, member of a petty royal house, and the Prince's second cousin.

In the next few years Katharine had more than one escape from an encounter with the Prince. At last in Paris, at the house of a common acquaintance, they found themselves face to face.

He carried it off with his old light-hearted grace. It was the most enchanting thing in the world, this meeting. Lady Peterborough entirely agreed with him. Even the Marquis de Courcelles made him welcome at Auteuil, when Katharine, for once flying Paris, took refuge in the home of her schooldays. Anton's appearance there, his instant alliance with the Marquise, gave Katharine a sense of seeing circumstances close round her again.

Not without admitting to others things that she shrank from formulating to herself, could she prevent Prince Anton's frequenting the house. It was plain that he had no share in Katharine's shrinking. All hers the pain of renewed contact.

That was the tragedy of it—that she cared still.

Rumour had of late linked the name of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein with that of a great singer. To Katharine's amazement, he spoke of Madame Baria. Then came the day when he told her that he had just had a serious disagreement with his wife about the singer, and the Princess had gone off in a frantic rage to her brother in Pomerania.

'And she has taken the child,' he added.

'Whose child?'

'Hers.'

‘The Princess’s?’

‘And mine, of course. It’s all right.’ He brought out the old phrase with a new inflection, and he stroked his moustache, as one who reflects upon good-fortune. But when he lifted his eyes, Katharine’s face arrested him. He tried to take her hand—took instead her recoil, without offence. ‘You perhaps don’t realize,’ he said significantly, ‘the advent of that small person alters many things.’

‘Of course. A child is a great tie.’

‘On the contrary,’ he returned with equal gravity. ‘My boy brought me my edict of emancipation. From the day of his birth he carries my burden. I am now, what I have never in my life been before: *a free man*.’ He spoke with the air of the successful strategist. It was as if he would have her believe the child’s existence was proof of nothing so much as his devotion to the woman he had not married.

Upon the first opportunity he returned to the subject of Madame Baria. How dared he be so unblushing about the matter!

‘My sympathies are all with the Princess,’ Katharine said coldly. His answer was to turn up his corn-coloured moustache sharply on either side, with a slow twist of thumb and forefinger, as if it were so that he not merely manipulated the military moustachio, but set the full lips smiling at their highest significance. He stood looking at Katharine over his two hands, arrested in the act.

‘What a pity,’ she thought, steeling herself against the remembered trick of manner, ‘what a pity he knows how well he looks like that! I am sure he has been told that is his “conquering smile.”’

‘It is horrible,’ she said, turning from him, ‘horrible that you should be so——’

‘So?’

‘——so false.’ She sat down with averted face.

‘If I deserved that epithet it was before I ever saw the Baria. But it is a little curious to be reproached by *you*.’

‘I admit,’ she spoke quietly again, and with a distinct effect of establishing distance—‘I admit that I have not the shadow of a right to call you to account. It would be grotesque of me——’

'It *would* be,' he said with sudden passion, 'if the one who is responsible for the affair were the one to condemn it.'

Her indignant refusal to admit the smallest responsibility in an odious breach of faith, he turned into his opportunity to tell her, with all the bitterness of the impassioned egoist, how he rued and deplored the wretched marriage Katharine's behaviour had paved the way for.

'Every hour since my wedding-day I have realized more poignantly that there is for me just one woman in the world.'

'Mme. Baria?' inquired Katharine, hating herself for the poor jibe, saying it to keep herself from tears.

'Baria!' he burst out, 'Baria will serve an end.' Luckily, Margaretha had definitely left him. It was to tell Katharine that, that he had come to Auteuil to-day. His wife would beyond a doubt get a divorce. No, Katharine need not start up with scared looks. Her fair fame was as dear to him as her love would be. Let her judge from that! No. The pretext would be Baria. *Now*, did Katharine understand!

The next day, taking Natalie, and leaving her god-mother behind, she joined Lord Peterborough in Devonshire.

Anton, not daring to follow her there, rained upon her such Liebesbriefe as only a German can write. Not merely mixing reverence with passion, others have mastery of that craft, but conveying what he would with a naïve simplicity, a naked directness as electric as disarming. An effect, this, due chiefly to the language in which he wrote, lending itself to that combination of the raw truth that goes home, and the sentimental that sounds so much more possible in German than in English—poetizing, philosophizing, appealing with every practised phrase of the man who has made this theme his study as well as his pastime. The same letters in English would have missed their mark; spoiled by that shrinking of the heart from the phrase worn commonplace, its significance chiefly ironic, reminiscent of long abuse. The old things said in another tongue came charged with the excitement of discovery, wearing a freshness as of Eden.

And he made good his claim to being more than soldier. Not only sent her books as time went on, wrote about them pertinently. In his more impassioned moods, made and sent dedicated to

her little Gedichte, that because they were not notably bad seemed brilliant.

But for all their hitting the mark, Liebesbriefe and Gedichte got for their return:

'It is no use. I wonder at your lack of knowledge of woman-kind. This "kind" of woman, you should know, I am not.'

And again:

'Your Highness is very daring. You will even be writing to me of Tugend as well as of Liebe. I do not know if "Virtue" is as strong in me as Pride. I only know, that although my feeling about you keeps me from anyone else, it will equally keep me from you.'

'Until the divorce!' he interpreted by return, with the comment: 'Strange what cruelty so gentle a being can wilfully inflict.' In each after letter, confident reference to the divorce. Then proceedings were already instituted!

The weeks went on bringing the letters, the books, the little mementoes. He was fertile in finding excuse for making her think of him. He understood, as nobler men have failed to do, what significance these material things may carry; more eloquent sometimes, in their guise of beautiful symbols, than copies of poetry or pages of protestation.

Since Katharine's return this time to England, whether she were in London or the country, Waldenstein's standing order at Gerard's, in Regent Street, brought her every Thursday a basket of La France roses—the flowers she had carried at the Drawing-Room that day they had first seen each other. Never the heavy pink buds were brought into the room, without bringing the sound of Prince Anton's voice, the look in his face.

With the prospect of the divorce held so steadily in view, it seemed less flagrantly unfit that he should address her in the terms he used; but 'es ist mir zuwider,' she wrote him again and again. 'Wait till we have the right to these dear words. To use them now is like asking me to wear Breitenlohe family jewels. They still belong to someone else.'

By dint of simply not noticing these portions of her letters, he bore down her objection to the manner, as well as the matter, of his address. He wrote now of their future together as one in the act of making practical arrangements.

Lady Peterborough's letters were of the same tenor. She suggested several times that Katharine should return to Paris, but the girl remained in Devon. Even Lord Peterborough was written to on the subject.

'Why don't you go?' he said, not dreaming the Prince was there. 'I don't want to leave you so soon again,' Katharine had equivocated.

'Oh, as to leaving me, I am going to Holland, as soon as I can get away,' and he expounded a holy mission to prevent an invaluable MS. from crossing to America. Still Katharine did not give him his discharge. The old man wondered.

Not till the Prince left France (all his movements were interpreted as hinging upon arrangements for the divorce)—not till then did Lady Peterborough return to London, summoning her family to meet her.

Katharine was nothing loth. German letters were many hours nearer in London than in Devon. Waldenstein himself was nearer, though she had expressly forbidden him to set foot on English soil 'until after.'

Lord Peterborough deposited Kitty in London, and hurried on to the Hague. He was hardly across the Channel before his wife began to complain as loudly of the desolate state of London during the Easter holidays, as though it were something never remarked before. The very idea of Devon this rainy weather made her ill. She developed a well-known but, to her entourage, very alarming symptom described by herself as 'creaking with boredom.'

On the following day she was considering a plan for taking Katharine and going to Berlin. Why not? The Carrs were to be there on their way from Egypt to St. Petersburg. Katharine was obliged to acknowledge to herself, that this was just the kind of sudden scheme for movement and diversion, that Lady Peterborough was capable of evolving at any moment, and yet—If Anton were not in Berlin, he was only a couple of hours away at his cousin's, Graf Wilhelm's.

'I don't feel like going abroad so soon again,' Katharine had said.

'Oh, you'd better,' returned her ladyship off-hand. 'You can't stay here alone.'

'I'll go to my father for a little. He has not been able to get away this Easter.'

Lady Peterborough produced her familiar snort, but said nothing.

It did not necessarily argue great affection for her god-daughter, that she should feel Katharine to be an essential part of the success of the German programme. She continued to say nothing further on the subject, but she postponed her plans for a day or two. Katharine, grown more analytic, fully expected that Lady Peterborough was waiting for the purpose of communicating the state of affairs to her ally. There would surely be imploring telegrams. But nothing. Not even the now usual daily letter. What had happened? Was Anton ill? Or angry at something Katharine had said in her last letter. She tried to recall precisely what she had written and waited anxiously; tried to quiet her nerves by setting aside her own preoccupations and devoting herself to her father.

Mention has been made of things that early disconcerted Katharine's loving admiration of him. These things, of one kind and another, seemed to have their origin in the fact that Colonel Dereham did not always speak by the card, nor even think with accuracy, as Katharine explained to herself; not yet knowing how the one vice inevitably breeds the other; so eager to find excuse for him that she got a kind of pitying comfort out of setting the effect before the cause.

When she at first, in all good faith, had prompted his memory or mended his misapprehension, he would look at her with an odd expression in his fine eyes, and say:

'You are very like your mother.'

'It's the only unkind thing he ever says of her,' the girl had thought with tender mystification.

Certainly Katharine, in spite of her somewhat lax training, and in spite, as the superficial might say, of her poetic leanings, felt for *la vérité vraie* that passion of the soul that realizes the largest optimism by refusing to believe that men can improve upon truth; with early glimpses of a further faith, that, should the first obvious Good—that all men yearn for—should that fail, the second will be there, the greater Good of bearing well the absence of the good we sought. If Colonel Dereham long ago, when he and his

world were young, had ever had glimpses of this source of high content, they were dimmed and lost in the light of these common days.

On going to Hill Street after her heroic decision not to accompany Lady Peterborough to Berlin, Katharine found her father in one of his strange, dulled, unsociable moods. His daughter's proposal to come, after Lady Peterborough's departure, to spend a fortnight with him, he received with some surface grace. And the next morning telegraphed her from Boulogne that he had felt so ill, he was seeking change! No address.

'I'll go with you after all if you'll have me,' Katharine said to Lady Peterborough. It seemed to be Fate.

The night they crossed the Channel, while Natalie in her mistress's state-room was hastily putting out the toilet things, in lugubrious anticipation of being speedily incapacitated for further service, her disgust at the unexpected journey found vent in guarded muttering against Lady Peterborough. Katharine laughed.

'It's not Lady Peterborough who makes you put to sea, my poor Natalie. It's I.' Oh no, it was her Ladyship. She had made up her mind Mademoiselle Katharine should go. 'Not a bit of it. She accepted my refusal without a murmur.' Without a murmur? Very like! Her ladyship did things more effectual than murmur. What 'nonsense' was she talking? Kind heaven! but nonsense was not in her line. 'Me? *I* use my eyes and ears,' said the Frenchwoman with severity.

'And then?'

'Then? I find that her ladyship does not accept it that Mademoiselle Katharine should decline to go abroad; should visit her father. She goes herself to Hill Street—Lady Peterborough does—to arrange that.'

'Ridiculous! Lady Peterborough never goes to Hill Street.'

'An exception, last Wednesday. She went to call on Colonel Dereham. He was not at home, hein? Much good that. She goes up to his bedroom, and talks to him for one half-hour.'

'How do you know?'

'Gibbs, he tell me. Therefore are we not in Hill Street, but God have mercy on us, here! Presently, no doubt, at the bottom.'

Katharine left the woman grumbling over her work, and went

above. A night of fitful moonlight and wind-driven clouds. Already they were off. No sleep for Katharine Dereham unless walking the deck awhile, with this salt breeze in her face, should quiet her nerves. If what Natalie reported was a fact, then the day after Katharine had said 'I'll go and stay in Hill Street,' the very next morning after she had arranged it with her father, Lady Peterborough had left Katharine in Bond Street, trying on hats at Angela's, and had driven straight to Colonel Dereham's.

Why should the circumstance, unusual, unprecedented as it was, disturb Katharine so profoundly? Even if the surreptitious visit had really taken place, was it anything new to find Lady Peterborough manœuvring to compass her own entertainment? The question was, had Anton been in communication with her? Or was she merely flying from London, on her own initiative, to avoid a time when her particular world had not returned from Easter outings—ready in her own conscienceless way to use Katharine as a bridge to pleasure, yet innocent of actual collusion. Oh, the fatigue, the ugliness of such speculation!

Her father, too. How strange he was of late! Was the Heathcote woman worrying?

Oh, to clear all the fog and doubt and double-dealing away! To speak honestly and to be honestly answered! The truth! The truth! There were times when that seemed to be all she asked of life.

More and more, where everything seemed shifting and uncertain, her soul thirsted for some sound assurance. How long would she be forced to live on this windy diet of implication, hint, insinuation, and such meagre sustenance as she could glean 'between the lines.' 'I am not meaning *you*, Anton,' she exclaimed in her heart, having meant most of all him, yet pitiful to the hurt such thoughts had done her old ideal of him. Up and down in the windy moonlight she walked the deck to tire out her fears, up and down with the scent of tar and salt in her face, insensibly soothed in her helplessness by the valiant forging-onward motion of the ship, buoyed up by the secret sense of superiority that visits the woman who may call herself 'a good sailor.' She loved it all—the swish of the spray, even the swinging and wavering of the deck, yes, the putting down the foot and finding the floor sunk half a yard, or risen till one strings the sinews for a

hill-climb—or as if one walked the waves themselves, or on the rolling clouds.

The morning found her in better heart. She helped the disorganized maids to get the luggage through the customs, and after the reviving cup of coffee and the brioche that tastes so wonderfully good the first day of one's return to it—she had shaken herself free of the shadows of the previous night, and yielded herself up to the thought that nearer, nearer, every minute of that day would see her to her goal! She stood in the corridor of the Berlin express, looking out at the flat, water-laned country, the familiar windmills, the women in sabots, wearing white poke bonnets over close-fitting hoods, basket on arm, hurrying briskly along the level roads in the pink and pearl-gray light of the early hour. Saw the marshes and canals drop their smoke and silver hues, and take on the gold of the advancing morning—tasted that intoxicating cup, the beauty of the world, which goes to the head like wine, and like wine wins us to think better of ourselves, our fellows, and our common fate, since here we are environed all about by glories such as these.

All through the day, each time the train stopped, Katharine sent out to buy papers. Searched them through for Court gossip, and for gossip of the courts.

But, after all, legal proceedings against a Waldenstein were not conducted as they were amongst the rank and file. Prince Heinrich, the head of the house, had power to dissolve the marriage, but naturally little willingness. He would no doubt try reconciliation first. In any case the hearing would never reach beyond the Castle walls. The reason that she had no letters, might be, that at that very instant the trial was going on, and Anton, no longer with his cousin in the Elbethal, was absorbed body and soul in fighting for liberty and her in the family council summoned to the Riesengebirge. Or was he in Berlin? Her guesses kept her on the rack.

Two days in the German capital without sign or hint of him. Then beyond any shadow of doubt he was gone to Waldenstein!

On the third morning a brief note bearing the same Wilhelmsruhe postmark, yet saying he had been away and that his letters had only just come into his hand; adding that he was proposing by the same post his plans for meeting.

To be so certain that she would fall in with it—that could mean only that he would be bringing her great and happy news. A moment's bitterness at the thought that she should have so descended from the crystalline heights of the old shining dreams, as to call 'great and happy,' the news of a man's divorce from an innocent woman, his freedom to offer the lees of his life to her, to Katharine Dereham!

His letter to Lady Peterborough made no mention of any earlier communication from her. Merely regretted not having been in Berlin to receive her, and suggested that for fear the fine weather might not last, she and Miss Dereham should come two-thirds of the way the following day by train, to meet him and his cousin for half a day's coaching in the Sächsische Schweiz.

These were so far from being the conditions Katharine would have chosen for their meeting, that she had a moment of thinking she would not fall in with the arrangement. But the need to see him now, without delay, was grown too great for her to cavil at the where and how. To-morrow, then.

CHAPTER VIII

LADY PETERBOROUGH dropped her Carri without a pang. The morning that she and Katharine took the train agreed upon, brought the same weather that had thus far smiled upon them, mild and bright.

‘I made an excursion very like this when I was a girl,’ the old woman had said in high good humour. Before the train stopped at their destination she dropped the *Tageblatt*, and put her head out of the window, instantly ejaculating, ‘I see him!’

‘Graf Wilhelm too?’ inquired her companion for the sake of saying something.

Katharine’s outward stillness gave no hint of the tumult within. It was Lady Peterborough who was all animation, excitement, volubility. Through the window she made a slight motion with a stiff rheumatic hand in its loose white glove. ‘They see!’ She smiled with unusual urbanity. ‘I like a man to take off his hat like that, and to stand so, bareheaded, as if we were Kings and Queens, my dear. None of your Englishman’s uneasy haste to get his headgear out of his hand! Kind Heaven, what have those two got on! Lincoln green with scarlet waistcoats. Oh, these dear Germans! How it carries one back! And their buff leather——’ The slowing train stopped with a bump that precipitated Lady Peterborough into her seat feeble with laughter. ‘And you’ll find they think their clothes are English!’ she gasped. ‘I’ve seen it in a modified form before. In their grim determination to dress pour le sport à l’Anglaise, even the foreigner who knows England at first hand, will put on things that no Briton out of Bedlam——’ She thrust her black wig once more out of the window: ‘Saints in Paradise! what is it they’ve got on their heads? *Tyrolese hats*, my child, with feather tufts at the back! Oh, these dear Germans!’

Katharine had sat quite still, and let Lady Peterborough do all the reconnoitring. The first she saw of Anton, he was at the window thrusting aside a Gepäckträger, even the magnificent guard, and himself throwing open the door. His hand crushed hers, then carried it to his lips. His eyes could not have smiled in that fashion into hers if all were less than well!

Graf Wilhelm was made known: a man of fifty odd, with a big stomach and a round grey-whiskered face. Very urbane and inclined to laugh noisily on small provocation. The appearance of the two, if extremely smart, was in truth somewhat surprising. Apart from the question of hats, it could not be denied that few Englishmen would have had the courage to confront the public so attired; but the effect was at least as 'sporting' if not as English as intended. The waistcoats alone were enough to make the most spleenful Briton smile, but after all they were immensely becoming—at least, Waldenstein's was.

Katharine, intent on considerations more important, was conscious only of that spice of foreignness, that gay pictorial quality, which is one of the islander's gains in going abroad. Not a case of waistcoats and flamboyant ties alone—these did but match the more picturesque manners, the hand-kissing, the very way they had doffed again the absurd green hats. All very well for an Englishman to scorn such doings. He has no skill in these things.

'What a day!' Katharine, conscious of the tell-tale radiance of her air, turned her face up to the cloudless sky as if to insist: 'It is this sweet spring sunshine at noontide flood, not reassurance in the shining looks of my lover, that makes my world and me so gay.' Talk and laughter between Lady Peterborough and the two men flowed on, as they walked the long platform, now under its high glass roof, now downstairs, now along passages of vitrified brick, up again and out at the main entrance.

'I thought you said a drag!' Lady Peterborough arraigned Prince Anton as he stopped beside a carriage.

'It will come for us in an hour,' answered Graf Wilhelm, stepping forward with an air, and handing her in—'after we are fortified with a little déjeuner.'

As Katharine waited to follow her god-mother into the landau, she turned quickly and, risking remark, said to Prince Anton under her breath:

‘Well?’

‘Well!’

‘Is it well?’

‘Can you doubt it?’ Of course not, not from the moment she had seen his face at the carriage window.

‘What are all the flags and decorations for?’ demanded Lady Peterborough as they drove off.

‘Even the old town is glad to-day,’ the Prince said to Katharine. They exchanged looks, like two children with some gay secret.

Graf Wilhelm, more explicit, answered: ‘The birthday of our Saxon King, your ladyship.’

Through the crowded streets they clattered at nearly as inconsiderate a pace as the Droschkas, whose Kütscher drove gaily over the populace by virtue of being Erste Klasse. Through the Altmarkt, past the Königliche palace and the Hofkirche, that Graf Wilhelm said Frederick the Great had bombarded, and where at that moment old King Albert and his Court were hearing the High Mass celebrated. A glimpse of royal coaches, as the travellers drove by, and here they were at their hotel.

They breakfasted before silver épergnes in which the floral decorations were peonies made of scarlet feathers. Again Lady Peterborough twisted her old face and murmured: ‘These dear Germans!’ and the only one to resent either look or words was Katharine, it seemed.

She could have wished—grown suddenly sensitive to their fair fame—that Germans of Graf Wilhelm’s generation ate more fastidiously—more after the manner of Prince Anton and ‘people generally.’ The type of what she had heard with disgust called ‘the heavy feeder’ was intensely antipathetic, and she kept her eyes turned religiously away from the offender as much as was possible. But Graf Wilhelm was far from unintelligent, and as great a talker as he was a trencher-man.

Anton had taken out of the back of the carriage a parcel, which he produced during the meal and proceeded to undo. A very beautiful bit of old porcelain, the figure of a girl.

‘I have to be very careful. It is only lent to me—out of the royal collection. But you see who it is like?’ he asked Katharine. ‘It has for me a look of you.’

Graf Wilhelm thought the same. Lady Peterborough couldn't see it. 'But it is quite exquisite,' she agreed.

'I must return it to-morrow, but I want to get the people at Meissen to copy it. One for you and one for me,' Prince Anton said to Katharine. 'We can go anywhere you like any other day. What do you say?' he turned to Lady Peterborough, 'what do you say to driving through the valley of the Elbe to the Potteries this afternoon?'

'Surely everything will be shut!'

'No. I've wired. I've arranged that the man I want to see shall be there.'

'Ah! You have arranged that you will have your own way. Then why the formality of asking us?'

In the good-humoured sparring between the two, Katharine declined to bear a share. 'Just as Lady Peterborough thinks,' she said, not indeed greatly caring, since she and Anton were not to be alone, in which direction or upon what pretext they all went driving through the April sunshine. In any case he would surely make his opportunity to tell her the news she longed so desperately to hear. Or rather the particulars. For now she knew his news. The sound of a horn blown loud.

'The King going by?'

'I rather think our coach.' They found it at the door. Graf Wilhelm climbed to the box seat, and Anton stood below handing the ladies up.

'You goin' to drive?' demanded Lady Peterborough, watching Graf Wilhelm with suspicion.

'I am to have that pleasure.'

'Well, I hope it will be a pleasure all round,' she said darkly, and then, with heroic aspect, mounted. 'No, Katharine should sit on the box,' she said, her ladyship's plan being obviously to appropriate the Prince. Katharine and he followed. The grooms sprang into their places. Graf Wilhelm gathered up the reins, a blast on the shining horn, and away they went through streets, gay with the green and white Saxon banners, and the sunshine and the holiday crowd.

Now they were stopped by the police, and made to wait some moments before they could cross the street. The monarch was on his way to the Review. Here they were, the kindly old King

with ruddy face and frosty beard, and sitting beside him, the Emperor William, come to do him honour, dressed in white, with white cock's feathers blowing over a shining helmet.

The old King, bowing right and left, smiled and nodded at Graf Wilhelm. The Emperor turned his head slightly, levelling a sharp look at the party on the coach, with hand lifted returning the men's salute. A little pause, and a second carriage with the Queen and the Princess Mathilde; a third and fourth.

Prince Georg had made sign of recognition to the men on the coach. Upon Lady Peterborough's sharp repetition, 'Who is that?' Graf Wilhelm told off the lesser royalties as the carriages rolled by. When the last was gone, the populace overflowed the highway, compelling the big coach to move slowly for the first few yards, but the way cleared before a blast from the horn, and the great vehicle went clattering over the cobbles of the long Leipziger Strasse, till it left the town behind. Out here were smooth and pleasant roads, bordered by gardens, or by sunny meadows sloping down to the Elbe, fringed with the tender green of April leafage. And now they were in Apple-blossom Land; for mile after mile they drove between orchards in full bloom, upon a roadway carpeted with fallen flakes of pink and white.

'In a minute,' Graf Wilhelm said, 'we shall see, on that hill over there, the ruin of the Schloss that is the twin of Waldenstein.' Noticing Katharine turn with kindling looks, Lady Peterborough observed with decision, 'I shall save myself for the Potteries. Scaling this coach will be climbing enough for one day.'

'There's a road part way up,' Graf Wilhelm consoled his companion. 'We'll go as far as the Forst Haus. There it is.' High above the new building, of a cringing ugliness, the old castle lorded it even in its ruin.

'That,' Graf Wilhelm pointed with his whip, 'that was the Wittwen Haus of the ancestors of the present King on his mother's side. The Margrave who built it was born in the room where my cousin, here, first saw the light.'

'How was that?' asked Katharine. 'How did the Waldenstein come here?'

'He was a younger son too, and having married a South German, he searched all Saxony for a site like Waldenstein.'

'If he thought this was like it the gentleman was blind,' said Anton, a trifle impatiently.

'No doubt in his day,' the other defended the Margrave, 'the woods were as fine about here as yours of Waldenstein. You can't deny he found a hill set above a river, just where three valleys meet, and he built his castle in every respect like the one he had been born in.'

And Waldenstein is older still, thought Katharine, looking up at the ruin. Was the day not far when from windows framed before those that were crumbling on the cliff, she would look out upon a world like this, only wooded where this was bare, like this commanding three several valleys, like this divinely smiled upon by curving river, and rich sunshine and apple-trees in bloom? 'And so Waldenstein's like this!' she said aloud.

'Only the old part. Let us get on, shall we?' Prince Anton suggested.

'About what date is this?' Lady Peterborough turned to him, the only one of the party who had seemed to take no sort of interest in what Graf Wilhelm had been saying.

'A——'

While Prince Anton hesitated Katharine turned, and over her shoulder said, 'I think you told me the Waldenstein date was 1200 and something.'

'No, no,' cried out Graf Wilhelm, 'two hundred years earlier.'

'Oh, very like,' said the other.

'What!' Katharine threw over her shoulder, 'you drop two centuries out of your family history as lightly as that!' He seemed not to hear.

But she had done this red-faced Graf Wilhelm an injustice. He had great feeling for these things of the past, that so fired Katharine's imagination. He was leaning back now answering a question of Lady Peterborough's: 'Yes, it was that Margrave of Waldenstein, who built this in 1062—more than a quarter of a century before it came into the hands of the present reigning house, by marriage.'

'The present reigning house!' echoed Lady Peterborough. 'I always say your German families give most of ours a very mushroom air.'

'Of course,' Graf Wilhelm admitted, 'ours of Saxony is the

oldest reigning house in Europe. They've sat on the throne for over eight hundred years.'

One family keeping such power in their hands all that time! through the most eventful 800 years the world had known—keeping it to this hour! The old man they had just seen took on for Katharine a new significance. How tenacious were these Teutons! Not in mere domination so much, as in this long continuance of it, lay the triumph of the aristocratic idea. Otherwhere dynasties rose and fell, whole nations were wiped out, and still the same house ruled Saxony, and still in the Pomeranian forest Princes of Anton's blood sat firm on the Waldenstein crag.

And she was to have her share in this long story! Nothing that she heard or saw but took on sharp significance. Nothing so trivial but it would bear upon what was coming. These things were to be the background of her new life.

Now they were waking echoes in the Meissen streets. 'That is the Dom,' Graf Wilhelm pointed with his whip. 'The finest example of Gothic in Saxony.' Prince Anton's animation came back only when they approached the Potteries. Everything at the great factory shut and silent. But no, two brisk young men, and an old gentleman, who seemed vastly pleased that Prince Anton should have come personally to him about the order. He examined the statuette through great round spectacles, and asked leave to keep it till the following day.

'Now these ladies will come down and look at some of your fine things!' said his patron.

'Unfortunately——' many apologies; everything shut and locked. 'Any other time——'

'I told you it would be like this!' Lady Peterborough called down; and as the talk below went forward, Graf Wilhelm joining in, she gave herself the satisfaction of whispering in Katharine's ear: 'Dreadfully spoilt these little royalties! They think no rule holds for them.'

'Oh, well,' said Graf Wilhelm. 'You can see all this another day. In any case it is nearly the hour when all English ladies must drink tea.'

'Not in Germany!' said Lady Peterborough with telling emphasis.

'But mine is Russian caravan tea. You will like it, I am

bold enough to believe. I told them to be ready for us any time after four.'

'Where?'

'At Wilhelmsruhe.'

'Oh, is your place near?'

'Not half an hour's drive,' said Anton.

'You seem to have the afternoon very carefully mapped out.'

'Your ladyship mocks me. But I will not have you wholly disappointed. It is a very good exchange, I assure you. My cousin has things infinitely better worth seeing than any they could show you here.'

It was not yet five o'clock when the coach drew up before a great bare unbeautiful house set in a charming old park. The owner seemed to be under no illusions about it. 'I have nothing, I regret to say, like Waldenstein to show you here,' he said, when the chimneys emerged from the trees.

'It's infinitely more comfortable,' returned Prince Anton.

'Horribly new, as you see,' his cousin went on to Lady Peterborough, 'built on the site of the old place in my father's time when taste was—what you see.'

'But that tower nearly hidden, surely——'

'Oh, yes, they saved that and the picture gallery.'

'*And* the pictures and things,' said Anton. 'You'll forgive me the Potteries, Lady Peterborough, when you see what I mean.'

'I am sorry my wife and boys are away. You must try to put up with bachelor entertainment.' Graf Wilhelm led the way into a large hall, carpeted with skins and hung with trophies of the chase. A green and scarlet macaw on its perch in a bay window received the intrusion with a watchful silence, but on anyone's near approach, began describing invisible circles in the air with its wicked-looking beak.

The promised Russian tea was served with coffee and wines, and the imaginative German Kuchen, on tables ranged near a porcelain stove that reached nearly to the ceiling. Lady Peterborough sat near the source of the mild diffused warmth, drinking tea with rum and lemon, highly commended by her host, who for his own part drank a beverage undiluted, more fiery than tea. 'It will be cold driving back. You will have to lend

us wraps,' she said, with an obvious drop in her enthusiasm for more coaching in the chill of a late afternoon, however beautiful.

Katharine, realizing in herself a mood of growing restlessness, interpreted the long lingering over the little tables in the pleasant hall, as pure consideration for Lady Peterborough's aged bones. She and the host did most of the talking. The effect of high spirits that Prince Anton had presented at the station in the morning, and during the earlier part of the drive, had degenerated hour by hour into something like a nervous vivacity between fits of abstraction. Why was he so—so—what was it? Katharine's happiness of the earlier day suffered conscious check. Her nerves responded nicely to the uncertain balance of his own. A sense of excitement invaded her, very different from the quickening joy with which she had greeted his face at the railway-carriage window. A move at last! Lady Peterborough got up from her comfortable corner, and went to look into the sunk garden Graf Wilhelm had been talking about. 'I will have one like that in Devonshire,' she said, disregarding the cabalistic circles the macaw, upon her approach, at once began to describe in the air with its writhing head. Lady Peterborough's next remark was drowned by a horrible shriek from the bird. Katharine started up, shaking from head to foot. Anton laughed. 'How nervous you are!'

The object of the macaw's malediction looked out unmoved. 'Very nice. Yes, I could do that in Devonshire. Where's the coach?'

'Isn't it there yet?'

'No.'

'My cousin will show you the gallery if you like while I——' The host caught up his Tyrolese hat. Prince Anton roused himself with sudden animation.

'Of course, yes. It's this way, Lady Peterborough.' Through a little vaulted passage that had been a Gothic porch, they reached a vast room, bare but for its divans and occasional bronzes and the pictures on the wall. The windows on the west looked across a grassy court to the clock tower, standing black against the sunset. The two visitors were led down that side of the long gallery past the older paintings. All portraits these, and

many unsigned, done in the days when renown was oral and there was less to remember. In a world not yet choked with rubbish, no one was afraid the maker of a fine picture or a fine poem would be forgot. Margraves and Princes, Kings and Queens, knights and ladies—— ‘Wilhelm could tell you stories about these people. Some of them have places in the songs and legends of the people, but I am no good at remembering such things.’

‘Not even when they’re about your own ancestors?’

‘There are too many,’ he said impatiently.

‘Ancestors or stories?’

‘Both. Life is so much shorter than it used to be; we have time nowadays——’ Lady Peterborough was a little in advance—he lowered his voice: ‘*time only for ourselves.*’

Again, and more acutely, was she conscious of an effect of restrained excitement about him.

The old clock struck the hour. Lady Peterborough glanced through the window and compared it with her watch. The action, simple as it was, seemed to ruffle him. He hoped she was not bored or tired. Would she sit down a moment here, in front of the Holbein? This was, with one exception, the finest thing in the collection.

He placed her to the best advantage, but complained of the light. No, it was quite right, she said. But he rang and set the garrulous old butler to drawing the curtains, while the Prince himself went about turning up the electric light. The old servant, a little dazed by the command, continuing to remind Seiner Hoheit that there was still quite good daylight abroad, began on the right his lowering of the curtains. ‘No, this side first,’ Anton said irritably, and Katharine felt that he was appeased only when the grim old clock tower was shut out behind scarlet silk. As well as if he had told her, she knew that he wanted the face of time hidden, the fact of time forgot. Yet he and she were not alone—and he stood committed to a task she knew was little to his liking. Why was he setting himself, with such unwonted determination, to show off the gallery to the best possible advantage? What was it to him? And the answer she knew was: Time. But why *this* time? He would see her again directly, under conditions far more favourable.

‘No, don’t look at that abortion,’ he said, hurrying her past

a great Rubens ruddy as a butcher's shop, '— here's a Rembrandt.'

'Surely it is Saskia!'

'Yes, isn't she irresistible in her plump effrontery? I always want to pinch her cheek.'

He turned suddenly back to Lady Peterborough, and bent over her, looking back at Saskia and telling some story the picture had recalled. Lady Peterborough brightened visibly under this infusion of narrative. She looked round as Katharine joined them. Yes, the old man had finished his task with the many windows, and was gone.

'Well,' demanded Lady Peterborough, 'what news from Waldenstein?'

Prince Anton hesitated, and then with an air of aloofness he seldom adopted with Lady Peterborough, made answer: 'Miss Dereham shall tell you that.'

Katharine was sensitive to the rebuff administered, more by the Prince's manner than his words; Lady Peterborough, however, uttered a half-mocking but good-humoured '*Ah!* And is your cousin perhaps waiting in the hall meanwhile?'

'Oh, no,' he said, with a return of his friendly animation, 'he will join us here. But he won't forgive me if I show you so little.' He went on pointing out this and that. 'These absurd old Lucas Kranachs are most delightful things—every bit as good as any the Czar has in the Hermitage.'

'That's fortunate,' said Lady Peterborough, regarding the queer saint a trifle sardonically. 'For I shall not go to Russia to inspect the Czar's.'

'No need to go to Russia. Come next year to our Deutsche Kunst-Ausstellung. The Czar is lending us his Kranachs.' He crossed half-way to Katharine. 'I never allow anyone to go by without paying their respects to Peter Vischer's dog. You have not even seen him!' He halted before the bronze.

But Katharine had yielded herself up to the experience of being not arrested merely, but actually hailed by the glance of a face that looked darkly out of a great frame farther on. A man of lean, commanding aspect, high ruff and gloved hand upon his sword hilt, who seemed advancing to meet her.

'How unmistakably the cavalier!' she said.

'Yes,' agreed the guide; 'van Dyck certainly did know how to paint a gentleman. But see what Peter Vischer could do with a dog.'

'You talk about your cousin's knowledge of things here, but you seem to know the gallery rather well,' said Katharine, returning from her interview with the cavalier.

'Yes,' came the caustic old voice from the ottoman. 'This is a new light upon you, Prince.'

'How?'

'I had not realized you knew—cared about painting.'

'Did you think I was an Englishman?' he asked maliciously.

Was that in return for the amused patronage of 'these *dear* Germans!?' He had not seemed to mind at the time nor even to hear. Katharine, aghast, hastened to say the first thing that came into her head.

'Is Graf Wilhelm a connoisseur?'

'Oh, only as all Germans of his class are.'

A distinct snort from the direction of the Peterborough divan. Prince Anton turned to her a face conciliatory, suave once more. 'Of course I admit that what is here is the gathering and the sifting of centuries. There isn't a new picture in the collection but the Israels and two or three other things of the modern Dutch school, except that Lenbach over there of Wilhelm's wife.'

'Ah!' ejaculated Lady Peterborough, giving way to her first expression of enthusiasm, as she left her divan and crossed that end of the gallery, to stand before a magnificent presentment of a most regal-looking dame. 'Ah, that's *painted!* And so that is the Gräfin! Who was she?'

'One of the Detmolds.'

'Really!'

'No one who sees that can rightly say the mistress of this house is not at home,' said Katharine. 'It is like a living presence. Are you and she great friends?' Prince Anton smiled and led them on, saying significantly:

'I like her better as a sister-in-law than I would as a wife. She has just sent for poor Wilhelm post haste. He has to leave at cock-crow to-morrow for Turin.'

'Ah! I suppose he has preparations to make——' observed Lady Peterborough.

‘Wilhelm? Oh no, he’ll be here in a minute. He hoped you might care to see the Porcelain Room.’ Prince Anton, with a sudden access of vivacity, pushed open a door at the end of the gallery, leading into a much smaller apartment, which the old butler had curtained and left ablaze with light. Glass cases in rows, and from surbase to ceiling, tiers of shelves filled with ware that gave the room its name. In the cases, old ivories and jewels, cups and vessels of agate and blood-stone; drinking bowls and tankards, craftily wrought and encrusted with rude jewels; enamels brought from the Palace of the Grand Mogul; mechanical toys; a hundred beautiful and ingenious things done in the days when there was time.

‘Why, it is a museum!’ exclaimed Katharine.

‘There used to be a clock here’—he was going from case to case.

A queer grunting sound—then an explosive, ‘Ich hab’s!’ from the end of the room.

‘Ah, is that you, Borromäus?’ Prince Anton laughed.

Between a high cabinet and a curtained window, under a shaded lamp, a man sat at a low table covered with tools, bending with distended cheeks over a blowpipe held to a spirit flame. Deliberately he laid aside the pipe, and, sticking a magnifying glass in his eye, looked fixedly at a shining object in his hand, while he gruffly greeted the Prince.

‘Allow me, Lady Peterborough, to present to you a genius. Herr Borromäus here is a great mechanical expert—among other things.’ The shock-headed gentleman, having got up, took the glass out of his eye, and awkwardly bowed. ‘I am sorry to say he is also a socialist, democrat—God knows what!’ continued the Prince, laughing. ‘This is no place for you, Borromäus.’

‘And why not?’ returned the man sturdily.

‘Because you care nothing for Art.’

‘God in Heaven, but you are very wrong there. I care greatly for Art.’

‘Impossible—impossible!’ insisted the other. ‘Art is a product of selection, conservation of the best, rigid rejection of the unfit. Nothing here,’ he waved a comprehensive hand, ‘nothing here but furnishes argument against democracy.’

'Far from it! Here I sit, surrounded by the results of work, good work.' Borromäus threw back his great head with a glare. 'Here, at least, a workman may feel himself at home.'

'Sophistry! Nothing here but emphasizes the value to the world of the aristocratic idea. What are you at? Why, *you've* got the clock. This was the thing I used to love as a boy. You see the crystal ball? When the thing's in order the ball runs all round this gold gallery.' He made as if to take it out of Borromäus's hands. But the genius drew back, guarding the old toy from profane fingers. 'Let me have it! When I was a boy I used to know how to set it going.'

'Yes, to going wrong,' muttered the man, sitting down at the table again. Since the Gräfin would not permit the clock to be taken from the room, it was plain she wanted it in no other hands than his, Borromäus's—though such matters were not, strictly speaking, his business.

Prince Anton had only laughed at the privileged character. 'No need to apologize for your amiability, my good Borromäus. Die schöne Gräfin gets what she wants out of doughtier men than you. The Detmolds have done just that since before Friederich der Stärke gave one of them that clock. No, no, it's not a bit of use for you to begin one of your harangues in *this* room. Nobody need ask a better argument against your leveling doctrines, than just what we can see within these four walls. Isn't it so, Miss Dereham? If it had been not for the reigning houses and the nobles, who had the love of beautiful things, the money to pay for them, and the power to guard them, how much of all this would have survived? Who of the men who made these things could have kept them from destruction? It's no use,' he laughed, turning his back on the man. 'Learning, art, all that went to make civilization, we owe its survival to the noblesse. Isn't it so, Wilhelm?' The master of the house stood in the doorway laughing.

'Is Borromäus denouncing you again?'

Small need to ask, with denial, argument, instance of 'the Republics of Italy,' 'Greece,' flung after the party, as they returned through the picture-gallery—the voice of the agitator from the Porcelain Room drowned in Anton's laughter, and the words tossed back: 'You owe everything to the nobles, I tell you

—it was they who recognised the good thing when they saw it, who encouraged men like you with praise and pence—and who handed on Art as they handed on social order.’

‘One of the coach horses is too lame to drive,’ Graf Wilhelm was saying to Lady Peterborough, with profuse regrets.

‘I suppose you can get us to the station?’

‘Of course, of course. But you will dine first?’

‘What are the trains?’

‘There is one before nine, I think. But I have sent for the new Kursbuch. I will bring you word.’ He left the ladies at the gallery door, and returned to the hall. Lady Peterborough followed; but Katharine went back to look at her Cavalier. Anton had disappeared. He would return, and there would be time for a quiet word.

When Lady Peterborough reached the hall, it was empty. She went over to a table, and picked up a French novel. The old butler came in grumbling at the heels of a brisk young footman, took some letters from him, and bade him go about his business. Didn’t he know this was the butler’s affair?

Still muttering to himself, after the withdrawal of the offender, the old man ranged the letters on the table—a pile for the master of the house, for Prince Anton one. As if hypnotized, Lady Peterborough, staring at the single letter, advanced a step or two. The macaw, craning suspiciously, and ominously circling with its head, emitted a hoarse shriek. The old butler started. His nervous, palsied hands knocked the single letter off the edge of the table on to the floor. Catching sight of the visitor, the old fellow bowed deprecatingly, and mechanically begged pardon.

‘Schöne Schrift,’ said Lady Peterborough, and as he picked, the letter up, face down, she added, ‘Ich kenne diese Wappen,’ and she looked at the *chiffre* under the embossed armorial bearings. ‘Have you ever seen that beautiful writing before?’ she demanded, as he replaced the letter on the table.

‘Every day, gnädige. It is the, as you say, beautiful handwriting of the Princess Margaretha of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein.’

‘Ah—“every day.” The Prince, I dare say, is not so good a correspondent as all that.’

‘Not perhaps to everyone. But to her Highness, his wife, he writes every day, or very nearly,’ he said with approval. ‘Ladies

are not pleased when they have no letters—is it not so, gnädige?’—he wheezed out a laugh and doddered away.

Lady Peterborough turned from the table, and walked to the armchair by the tall porcelain stove. But instead of sitting down, she stood there looking at the tiles. In communication with her! In constant communication! Upon Graf Wilhelm’s reappearance, with an open railway guide, she did not turn nor speak.

‘The only good train, I am sorry to say, goes in three-quarters of an hour.’

‘That will do,’ she answered.

‘It leaves scant time for dining.’

‘There is no need. We will sup later. Will you see about the arrangements for our reaching the station?’ Graf Wilhelm looked sharply at her.

‘I am at your ladyship’s command, but I had hoped——’

‘Thank you,’ she interrupted him. ‘How soon can we have a carriage?’

‘Oh, in ten minutes. But that would give you a wait at the station. Unless indeed,’ he suavely presented her with a cloak for her sudden inimical mood, ‘unless you care to look into the Dom for a few minutes. It is very fine lit up.’

‘No, thank you. I have seen enough for one day.’

‘So? Entschuldigen——’ he withdrew.

‘Why had he not rung the bell and issued his orders as other men did? Humph! There was a great deal of running about. Humph! I suppose I made him feel it best to run—but they have curious ideas of behaviour here.’

When, but for the disquieting company of the macaw, she had been alone sixteen minutes by the clock, she got up and vigorously rang the bell.

‘Tell Miss Dereham—the young lady who is with me—that I wish to see her.’

‘The lady——’

‘Yes, the lady! Go quickly. She is in the picture gallery.’

The footman hesitated an instant, and then disappeared. He returned to say the lady was not there.

‘Where is Prince Anton?’

‘His Highness has gone out.’

'*Gone out!* Graf Wilhelm, then. Tell your master Lady Peterborough must see him at once, instantly, do you hear?'

The man assured her that he did, and incontinently departed, amid renewed screams from the macaw.

'If they leave me alone much longer with that bird I shall wring its neck,' she decided.

'Ten thousand apologies,' began Graf Wilhelm, entering hastily.

She cut him short. 'Where is Miss Dereham?'

'Miss Dereham? Oh, she thinks she would like to see the Dom——'

'No! It is too late. Be good enough to tell her to come here.'

'She has already gone, your ladyship.'

'Gone! How?'

'In the landau. My cousin——'

'Does she imagine there is time to go on her fool's errand and come back?'

'Come back?'

'Yes, for me. How am I to get to the station?'

'Your ladyship could not imagine—— I have, of course, carried out the commands your ladyship laid upon me—— My wife's phaeton will be here in five minutes.'

Lady Peterborough glanced angrily at the clock.

'Nearly half an hour ago you said in ten minutes.'

His only answer was to ring the bell. But he was obviously very ill at ease. The voice and aspect of this guest of his seemed to have as disturbing an effect on him as it obviously had on the macaw.

'Say we are waiting,' he said to the servant.

'The phaeton is here, Herr Graf.'

'I will go first to the Cathedral,' announced Lady Peterborough. He hesitated. 'You are not afraid you may in that way lose your train?'

'Tell your man to drive fast.'

Looking sharply right and left at all the passers-by, she paid small attention to the conversation her host made by the way. Now they were clattering along a slanting street, and now they stopped before the steps of the Cathedral. Graf Wilhelm, watch

in hand, observed: 'They are quite sure to have gone to the station by this time, but I will just glance in.' To his amazement his companion insisted on getting out and doing the glancing for herself. No sign of Katharine in the beautiful dim spaces.

'The station!' Graf Wilhelm said to the coachman imperatively, as he handed Lady Peterborough back into the phaeton. '*We must not lose this train!*' Off again, bowling down the steep street, while Graf Wilhelm kept up his polite commentary upon Gothic architecture, and the fine mortuary brasses there were here, and all this in spite of the fact that his guest was at no pains to disguise her total lack of interest in Sidonia's monument, or to conceal her own anger.

The phaeton dashed up just as the train came into the station. With incredible agility Lady Peterborough precipitated herself out of the pony carriage, and made for the platform, Graf Wilhelm following close. 'This way for the Erste Klasse,' he said.

'I don't care what class. Where is Miss Dereham?' She was peering among the few passengers.

'Miss Dereham is, of course, in the train. Let me help you in, and then I will go and find her.' He took hold of her arm.

'I will not get in till I see Miss Dereham!' said Lady Peterborough, with sudden fire. Graf Wilhelm drew back, as she went hurriedly along the platform, peering in at Erste Klasse windows, and saying to guards and Gepäckträger: 'Did a young lady get in at this station?'

'Yes, gnädige Frau; three young ladies.'

'No, I saw those three. I mean a tall Fräulein with a grey hat.'

'I did not notice their hats. Einsteigen!' The guard held the door. Again Graf Wilhelm offered an assisting hand.

'Not till I know she is here.'

'You will lose the train yourself!'

Her only answer was to draw back. The guard slammed the door; the train moved off, leaving Lady Peterborough staring after it. Graf Wilhelm stood, obviously perplexed, with his hands in his overcoat pockets.

'Miss Dereham no doubt consoles herself thinking you are in another carriage.'

'She isn't there herself. You know she isn't there!'

'Your ladyship overestimates my powers of clairvoyance. But I should have thought her being there impossible to doubt.'

Lady Peterborough was taking little aimless steps up and down the platform. She spoke to a man in uniform about trains. Her face had begun to wear that ghastly, corpse-like look that unwonted emotion or fatigue will quite suddenly imprint upon the old. Under the greenish station gas she looked a hundred.

Graf Wilhelm went forward. 'The slow train goes in fifty minutes. Will you allow me to order dinner for you at the hotel here?'

'No. You will take me back to Wilhelmsruhe.'

'To Wilhelmsruhe!' He stared.

'To Wilhelmsruhe. And I will look in again at the Cathedral on the way.'

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Prince Anton came back into the gallery, Katharine was disappointed, even chilled, at his proposal to go and see the Dom.

'Oh, thank you, but I think not.'

'We'll go this way,' he said. Had he not heard, or was that his way of accepting her decision?

He opened the west door of the gallery and led her across the court. He walked so rapidly that she had some difficulty to keep up with him; and he added no single word to his 'This way.' How much more a creature of moods he was than she had realized! But he had, no doubt, been living through trying hours. At the Tower Gate a carriage waited.

'But I said'—while she was trying to give reasons for refusing, she was being handed in. After all they must secure some little time in private. She must know—he no doubt wanted to tell her. . . . She turned to him as they drove off through the beeches, only to find her hands grasped and her ears filled with a whispered torrent of emotional German.

Whatever had been happening at Waldenstein, however the divorce had been gained, and whenever to take effect—such sober considerations must needs wait. Not all unwillingly she yielded her thirsty soul to the passionate outpouring. After the days of waiting, after the last hours of suspense, words like these fell with the quickening freshness of water in the desert. Now that they were before the Dom, he did not even pretend that he wanted her to see it. He glanced at the time, seemed to go through some rapid mental calculation, and then, 'Home!' he said to the coachman. 'Round by the clock tower again.'

'That is a far prettier entrance than the main one,' she approved, and with an effort: 'But you must tell me about——'

‘Yes, yes, when we get in. Drive fast!’ But he had not said go like mad, which seemed to be the coachman’s interpretation of the order. At one moment Katharine thought the horses were running away, and clung tight to the hand that held hers. ‘There is no danger,’ he whispered, and took up the old theme. Not merely his words, not only his nearness were at work upon her hurrying senses. The rapid motion wrought as well. When they drew up again under the clock, she was trembling so that in getting out she could not find the carriage step. The Prince lifted her to the ground; but quickly, almost untenderly, and led the way, not across the court as they had come, but into the tower. He had said something earlier about showing her ‘the other part.’ ‘Not to-night, *no*, dear Prince——’ but all day he had seemed to have no ears for ‘no.’

When she found him going up a narrow stair, she stood still, steadying herself against the wall. ‘There isn’t time!’ she said.

‘Plenty,’ he threw back without pausing. ‘It’s only a quarter of an hour to the station.’

‘No, twenty-five minutes,’ she returned with that same inward irritation that she suffered when her father strained the truth.

‘Time for a little talk,’ the voice came down out of the dimness, drawing her up after it.

The effect of the break-neck drive—the need of sharp despatch, the sense of the much to say and more to hear, and the flying minutes, sent her hurrying up the stair.

‘Why not sit down anywhere,’ she pleaded, ‘for the little time we have?’ No answer—up and up he went. When he gained a landing and made no pause even here, to Katharine following close behind the broad back, came a realization that often visits women, of the power that lies in masculine inexpressiveness.

‘We shall waste all our precious time in running about corridors and racing upstairs,’ she protested breathless. Neither word nor sign as he went on. ‘I can’t be interested in this old tower to-night, Anton. I can think only of——’ Up and up the expressionless broad back moved before her eyes. She paused again: ‘I won’t look at the armoury to-night!’ The figure above moved on. What coercive power in an ear that seems literally not to hear refusal! The mind a blank to it, robs the refusal

of its least effect, nullifies it utterly. More than once during that day she had had the sensation of being with one who understands only certain phrases of the language she was speaking. Either not talk at all, or one must needs say what can be made intelligible. This man leading the way up the dim-lit stair, did not understand 'No.' All day he had not.

But he paused at last; opened a door and held it for her to pass.

'I won't look at anything,' Katharine said breathlessly, and then stared about her in surprise. A small lamplit room of luxurious modern furnishing. 'Where is the armour?'

He laughed. 'Armour is of no use here,' he said in German, —'clean out of date,' and he came towards her with outstretched hands. She drew back, bewildered yet trying to marshal her wits.

'I want to hear——' she began.

The faint scent that always clung about him, tobacco, Russian leather and some discreet hint of flowers, came towards her like a tide. It closed about her.

'It is settled at last!' he said.

'The divorce?'

'That you are mine.'

'Then the divorce is granted.'

He stopped her mouth with kissing. Even in that headlong moment, the horrible intuitiveness of woman descended on her like a curse—or like some blessing won through anguish. As she lay that moment passive in his arms, the great struggle of her life went forward in her soul: 'He has been deceiving me!' The old turmoil of the mind that a lie, or even dread of lies, produced in her, gave her the sense that all the securities of life had failed her, all standards were in the dust.

If this man did not speak true, then was chaos come. The main fact of existence was not that she was shut in here alone with him—not that he was every second nearer losing what was left of self-command—these things were obscured by the horror of 'he lies.' But where was her own quick sense of truth? Why was she taking so meanly its betrayal? And with a shuddering distinctness she saw why it was that she was lamed.

Truth violated even in the secret places of the heart, may be

trusted to wreak this revenge, deadening perception, hampering revolt. And in the secretest place of all, Katharine Dereham *had known*. 'I have felt it coming all the afternoon—each turn of his thought, each rush, and each recoil and doubling—deep down in my heart, fathoms below admission even to myself, *I have been conscious of it all*. No innocent maiden trapped. His accomplice, I.'

Yet for all the moment's rude unveiling of herself to herself, she saw in flashes, pictures of a Katharine Dereham who should play at being caught, stand a sympathetic figure in the general eye while she tasted the sweet of yielding.

'Anton,' she said, 'the divorce is not granted.'

'She is Catholic,' he whispered thickly, holding her closer and looking into her face with half-shut eyes.

'She is right. And the church is right, and you and I are wrong, all wrong, Anton.' She spoke monotonously, with filling eyes. He laid his face on hers. She drew away, but gently.

'It would have been kinder to write me the truth to England,' she said.

'You and I would not be here if I'd done that.'

'No—and I at least would have been spared some of this pain.' She turned blindly to the door. A quick movement and he interposed between her outstretched, shaking hand, and the high-up ancient latch of heavy iron.

'There is no time for more now,' she said. 'I will go back to Lady Peterborough.'

'No!'

'Oh yes——'

'I do not mean you to go back.' She opened her lips. He stopped her. 'You don't in your heart want to.'

'Lady Peterborough——'

'Lady Peterborough has gone.'

'She would never do that.'

'I tell you she has gone without you. On my honour' (Katharine shivered) 'she is gone.'

She sat down in the nearest chair, staring at the lamp. Although he came and knelt beside her, his low words seemed to reach her from a long way off—things he had never dared to say plainly before, about the consecration of a great love, about

the holiness of freedom in these high affairs. 'Petty middle-class principles' had no application to people such as they.

'I seem to see,' she said at last, 'how well you have prepared me to hear all this. Little by little, since we met in Rome, you have—— No, why should I blame you? It is myself who is to blame, for letting go, one by one, the things that—that I believe I cannot live without, Anton.'

'What things?'

She shook her head slowly, and the tears rose again to her eyes.

'You can't give them to me, after all.' She drew her hands away from under his lips, and, crying softly, she rose up. Not seeing the door for tears, she yet moved towards it.

'Hush! stop! You don't understand: one must speak so carefully. You are lifted up or hurled down with a phrase. I saw you shrink when I said how easily that "marrying with the left hand" could be done to-morrow. I meant to-night—and what's in the left hand less than in the right——' he took her shaking fingers away from the high latch.

'No, no, you must not touch me. I—I can't think when you do.' But his arms were round her. That he did not kiss the face was because the face was hidden. Over the bowed head he poured out an excited torrent half in German, half in English—his boundless devotion; his loyalty, that being the man he was, no witnessed vow nor legal form could ever hope to coerce, but that she, the lady for ever regnant in his heart, would find her vassal and her slave—— As suddenly she lifted her white face, and looked at him, he recoiled: 'No, no!' he exclaimed, as if she had spoken—and then on a lower note, 'You are a statue. Not a woman.'

They stood there breathing quickly in the silence, looking in each other's eyes.

Then, muttering something in German she did not catch, he set his broad back against the oaken door, and looked down upon her with every feature set.

She came closer. He did not move an eyelash.

'Open the door,' she said.

'Do you imagine for a moment that I shall?'

'It is impossible for you to keep me here against my will.'

'You speak as though such a thing had never been done.'

‘It never has been. Not’—the trembling lips smiled faintly—‘not since woman realized——’

‘I am better informed. I know of cases.’

She winced inwardly. Baria, one? Oh no, she wore the Prince’s favour like a jewel or a feather. But had some other confronted him here in the tower—or elsewhere heard these words? The sense of moral sickness made her physically faint.

‘You have not known of a case like this. Not where the woman really did not want to stay.’ She interrupted his prompt asseveration. ‘Oh, yes, where she pretended—pretended very well. But not really wanted to—meant to go, *as I do*.’

He only shifted his position slightly, leaning more heavily on the door. Standing so, looking at each other, they heard steps. Anton turned sharply, and held a hand ready to shoot the heavy bolt.

‘If you do that,’ said Katharine very low, ‘I shall call out.’

‘Anton!’ Graf Wilhelm’s voice pitched cautiously.

‘Well!’

‘Come here. I must speak to you.’

An instant’s reflection, and Prince Anton opened the door a few inches, standing with hand upon the latch and face to the intruder. Katharine never moved from behind the door—every sense strained to make effectual use of the interruption.

Graf Wilhelm’s whisper, perturbed, angry, reached her distinctly, as he jerked out in indignant German: ‘. . . the devil to pay downstairs. She refused to go without Miss . . . She has insisted on returning here.’

‘Good God!’ the Prince ejaculated under his breath.

‘She is questioning the servants,’ the man outside added in growing agitation. ‘You mustn’t expect me——’

‘What on earth are you talking about!’ the Prince’s words were addressed to Graf Wilhelm—but they merely marked time. The real question was put when the hand, dropped from the latch, was held out in silent appeal to the woman behind the door—the fingers groping and trying to fasten on her arm. She seemed not so much to refuse as not to notice that vain asking for connivance—for courage to carry the fight to a finish.

Katharine came quietly round behind the Prince, and over his shoulder nodded to the man without.

‘Already train time is it?’ she asked in even tones.

At sound of her voice Prince Anton drew himself up—suddenly another man.

‘I am sorry if we have kept Lady Peterborough waiting,’ he said. ‘We will come at once.’

CHAPTER X

It was not till several years after Lady Peterborough's death, that Katharine fully understood the loyal part her god-mother had played.

After the funeral, she and Lord Peterborough, turning their backs on the big silent house in the old London square, had lived abroad, chiefly in Italy, where from time to time Colonel Dereham was with some difficulty induced to visit them. His coming seemed to gratify no one save Katharine, but Lord Peterborough, more and more dependent upon her, withdrew his old objection to Colonel Dereham's society, rather than be deprived of Katharine's. She realized in these brief visits how her father's health was going from bad to worse, his old easy temper so far lost that it was difficult to find even a valet who would live with him.

Although it would have cost Katharine a wrench to abandon her kind old guardian, she was self-reproached, sore even, to see how little her father seemed to want to have her with him. Such glimpses as she got of the kind of people he did want, were an unending surprise and chagrin. She more than once found herself regretting Lady Wick and the red-faced Captain, even Mrs. Heathcote, who seemed to have dropped out of the Hill Street life.

If from the spectacle of her father's physical decline she shrank secretly, as the woman will who has begun to husband what is left her of her own youth—still more did she recoil from the analogy in Colonel Dereham between the bodily undoing and the spiritual.

The old resemblance between him and herself that had been her girlish pride, became a torment. 'Will it be like that with

me too? Is this the real horror of leaving youth behind—that one is like to leave dignity and courage on the same rough road where we lost beauty? Did we come into the world with our arms full of blessings, and is the true story of each life a mere telling of how one by one we let our blessings fall?’

‘No, no!’ she reassured herself. The worthiest things in life we might keep fast hold of to the end, if we cared to. The great thing was to care. Truth in the old simile that life was like a garden—left to itself it ran to nettles. No character so fine it could with impunity dispense with discipline, a ceaseless watchfulness, and a ‘war on weeds.’ Colonel Dereham had let his garden run to seed. Not all his fault, Katharine maintained to herself, as intent as ever on excusing, justifying him. Wilfred Bruton was right when he said it was a prime defect in the military system that a man was shelved at a time of life when he ought to be doing his best work, thrown on his beam ends too late to begin anew, and with an experience behind him that merely unfitted him for ordinary civil life. If only she could get her father to work at something! But in any case she would set herself to tasks.

So it was she fled to books, and burned more than a wise woman’s share of midnight oil.

When the Boer War broke out she moved heaven and earth to get her father back again into active service. But there were too many younger, keener men agog for the chance of salting down the Boer farms with English bones. Every one of the men that she had laughed and danced and dined with, seemed to have claimed his right to a share in the protracted struggle, that Katharine and Lord Peterborough followed with maps and newspapers, hope and fear and horror.

‘Think of Bertie being so keen to go back to all that!’

‘Why not?’ demanded Bertie’s uncle.

‘Oh, *well!*’ Then, seeing Lord Peterborough’s resentment of her tone, she hastened to add: ‘I can understand how all those young men in the first enthusiasm, with the fever of the popular epidemic in their blood, and in sublime ignorance of what the step involved——’

‘Bertie Amherst is a soldier and the son of a soldier.’

‘Yes, yes, I know. But think how Bertie loves his comfort.

And think of what he went through at Ladysmith! *He* doesn't forget, poor dear. And yet even before he's well of his wound, back he goes.'

'You never did Bertie justice.'

'And all the others!' Katharine went on. 'When I remember the pampered lives they've led, the men who officer the British army, and then think of them down there marching on the burning veldt—starving, shot to pieces——' her voice shook, 'a boy like Bertie getting out of his sick-bed and hobbling back to his post——' huskiness swallowed the last syllables.

'I tell you, you've never appreciated Bertie. But there's nothing surprising in what he's done'—the proud old voice was coerced to steadiness, even to the level of the commonplace. 'It's always been like that. Read your history.'

'There have always been brave men. But these are men one can't imagine——. Idle, luxurious, as you must admit Bertie is—*was* (I beg his pardon, bless him!).—I hear him now, saying patriotism was all rot, and he was just going out for the fun of the thing. Fun!'

'Bertie's afraid of nothing more than a suspicion of heroics. He has all the Englishman's horror of a fine pose.'

'You are like that, too.' Katharine smiled.

'Humph! That may be the only reason I don't like to hear the type belittled. I confess I've small patience with the modern notion that because a man belongs to the upper class, he must therefore be a poor creature. When you were a foolish little girl you made an idol of one of these men, and because he disappointed you, you seem inclined to believe with the popular novelists, that the nobler virtues are the prerogative of the nameless and the penniless. It isn't so. I had to do in my young days with men of all classes. And I tell you that I found more fair dealing, courage, honour, in my own class than I did anywhere else. If you think I'm prejudiced ask any of the people who know both sides. Ask the great bankers, administrators. People of that sort will all tell you the same. The other point of view is promulgated to please the mob. *We* are the People! they like to think. It wouldn't be fair that a man who has half a dozen places and several hundred thousand a year should have any virtues to boot. And so from wicked baronets up, the pop-

ular opinion attains us all. The novel writers are middle-class themselves, they vaunt their own at our expense—except the smaller fry, who make us out splendid and idiotic.' He got up and walked about, a thing he seldom did in these days. 'No! Bertie Amherst is typical of what I mean. His South African record is no surprise to me. It's all in the tradition. We have been at it a long time. Right conduct is as cultivable as chrysanthemums. Bertie's record is no "sport," as the men of science say—it is a natural product. And no mean thing, my dear. But you've never appreciated Bertie.'

Katharine found herself justified in cultivating her own garden, developing new areas of enthusiasm, reaching out towards Art, and flowering in poetry.

Out of the Italian days, the days of their voluntary exile from harassed and unhappy England, had come a little sheaf of verse that Lord Peterborough told her marked advance, even mastery. Believing the time was ripe, both in Katharine's life and in her practice of her gift, he showed some of the later poems to an English man of letters. The none too complaisant critic was stirred to something like enthusiasm. He got leave, after some persuading, to put his own verdict to the rough and ready public test, by printing one of the poems. The success of the experiment led to its repetition. The new distraction helped Katharine through halting days; for the unwilling realization was being forced upon her that she was growing less able 'to garden,' as she called it. Had she kept too closely to her books of late? Or, she speculated miserably, was this the beginning of the long decline that had brought her father to the shadowed place, where he walked with uncertain, shambling feet, and that changed face with the discoloured daubs under eyes—eyes that seemed not to see. She consulted more than one doctor, and learned by that sure means to believe herself very ill. Nevertheless, when news came that Colonel Dereham on his return to England had suffered a relapse, she rushed across Europe to be with him, only to find herself rigorously shut out of the sick-room. But she stayed on, going to him whenever permission was granted, till the convalescence was well advanced, and he had persuaded her that she had left Lord Peterborough alone long enough. A few months later the same thing happened again, only Wies-

baden this time the scene. Again the waiting outside a guarded door, that opened at last to show the wasted gray-green face, the shaking hands, the uncertain temper, the undisguised desire to be left alone. Katharine learned forbearance and lost yet more of her buoyancy and bloom in her father's sick-room, but she never abandoned her hopes for seeing him, her plans for making him, strong again and 'very nearly happy.' It was to be 'her work.' Being Lord Peterborough's adopted daughter was an office too easy and pleasant to seem a duty. Her own father was her life's problem. No matter how small encouragement he gave her, to see him in better case was her mission, in a world out of which hope of personal happiness had died.

Matters stood so the winter after the Wiesbaden experience, when Katharine put an end to days of anxiety at the cessation of all news from Hill Street (save a disquieting scrawl from a servant) by declaring that she would leave for England the following day. Lord Peterborough and the Italian doctor stoutly opposed her plan.

But she was quite strong enough, she protested. Was she not going out that very night, a thing she had not felt able to do for weeks?

'You are doing it only to please an old friend. If I had seen Mary, I would have told her——'

Katharine cut the remonstrance short. She must attend to some shopping, there were things she wanted for the journey.

As she drove past the Grand Hotel, one of two men coming out of the court paused and lifted his hat. For a moment, summoned from such distance of abstraction, she stared. Then by a painful stirring of the heart, she knew, when she had passed, that it was Prince Anton. Oh no, nothing would induce her to look back. She was glad she had not known him; still more glad that she was going away from Rome. But he contended with her father the rest of the day in her thoughts. The hurried glimpse had been a little cruel to him; represented him as altered, heavy, dimmed. The sense of the change in him haunted her unpleasantly, like a libel on the dead.

Lord Peterborough had decided that since Katharine was not to be dissuaded from this journey that he was sure she had not strength for, he would go too. By way of preparation,

he said, but obviously being himself out of sorts, he went early to bed.

Katharine sat in the great room trying to read while she waited to be called for. Not wholly to please the Duchess of Worcester was she going to the Palace to-night. She found herself in a mood of mingled bodily and mental restlessness, when to sit at home and prosecute studies of the Art of the Renaissance was beyond her power. To be doing again 'the old things,' seeing the old sights, hearing the old familiar jargon, would keep at bay the new anxiety, the old pain. Still, 'Ought I to go?' she found herself wondering. 'Will he be there?' The opening of the door behind her, that meant Giovanni was come to announce the Duchess's carriage, cut self-questioning short. 'What a good thing she is a little before her time!' Katharine dropped her book, and got up to put on a cloak. As she turned she found herself looking into Prince Anton's face. She was too surprised to speak. And now he was bending over her hand, uttering old phrases in the old way. Yet how different it all was. Then, after a pause, at last something without the sting of association: 'You are not changed at all.'

'Oh yes, I am,' she found voice to say.

'I should be glad to hear you *were* changed, in one respect.'

'I am older,' she said quietly.

'I was thinking' (a touch of criticism in his tone, to meet her irresponsiveness) 'that you perhaps no longer waste time looking for the impossible.'

'There are at least some impossibilities that I no longer look for.' She stood very straight and tall in the long white cloak hanging loose on her shoulders and falling to her feet.

He drew off a trifle and surveyed her.

'You are wonderful to-night—you are more wonderful even than I remembered.'

'And you have time to remember?' she asked, recalling recent rumours.

'Not only time to remember, but to come to Rome to see you.'

She looked at him, a prey to sudden anger, not that he had *not* come to Rome for her, but that he should say he had. As her eyes rested on the wide, heavy face, the sudden fire in her

own died, giving way to a curious new shrinking, leagues away from the old delicious fear.

'How *could* you—how could you do it?' he said very low. She thought he was going back upon the past, and kept silence. But behold, memory with him meant as of old, yesterday. 'To go by, like that—without the faintest little sign. How could you, Katharine!'

She looked at him steadily: 'I didn't know you,' she said.

His laugh was a trifle forced. 'You want to pretend I am so changed as that?'

'We both are changed,' she repeated. 'Let us be glad.' She held out her hand.

'You are not dismissing me?'

'I am going out. Here is my friend.'

'I will come to-morrow.'

The words came back, again and again, as the train hurried her towards England—each time she remembered the Duchess's smiling confirmation of the gossip, as to what had really brought Waldenstein to Rome.

* * * * *

Katharine had not wanted Lord Peterborough to come with her on this hurried journey to England. She was even harassed by his presence. On arrival in London, telling only Natalie of her plan, she left the old man at the platform's edge, saying 'how do you do,' to the coachman, jumped into a hansom, and drove straight to Hill Street. A remembrance flashed across her of that other far-away day when, after meeting Anton in Rome, she had hurried in this selfsame way to her father, in hot haste to tell her wonderful news. She remembered the disconcerting apparition of the Heathcote woman in the drawing-room, and how, to get the taste of that encounter out of his mouth, her father had taken her to Lady Wick's—showed her that queer society which she, nevertheless, had grown to envy for him, in preference to associations more doubtful still. That was the night she had met the strange young man who had haunted Hill Street after, and watched her at the opera, followed her in the Park, and finally forced Peterborough House itself. Does a woman ever quite forget a man who has made her feel he *really* cared? She wondered. Men, of course, forgot—even a man

like Lord Peterborough. Had he not said, when the wound that Waldenstein made was new—had Lord Peterborough not said that she would sit one day as he did that night, trying to recover a twinge of the old anguish, and, like him, fail? It was not so. Even through all the disillusionment of this last meeting, the old wound throbbed and ached. If the old love stood for nothing but pain, it *did* stand for that.

The cab stopped. Her father! The fingers shook as the purse was searched for the fare. As she was getting out, casting anxious looks at windows that gave no sign, a news-boy rushed past crying an extra. 'Latest war news! Another Disaster!'

Bertie! Poor Lord Peterborough would forget all about her in buying up newspapers, and looking with frightened old eyes for Bertie's name among the killed.

Not at all of Colonel Dereham was she thinking at that moment when she rang the bell, but of poor Bertie, to whom she had 'never done justice,' and of his prefacing the perennial question that last time with: 'If you say "no," now, I shan't worry you again.' She knew he had said afterwards to Craybourne: 'I shall manage not to come home.' Tears rose in her eyes. 'And all my life,' she said to herself, 'I've loved Bertie in a way.'

'Latest war news!' the boy's voice came back from round the corner. 'Fresh Disaster!'

Gibb opened the door.

'My father—how is he?'

The man looked scared.

'He is very ill?' She leaned against the table in the hall. 'He is dead!'

'No, no, miss; only a little unwell. He will be able to see you to-morrow.'

She flung off her heavy travelling cloak, and ran up the stairs, conscious, with rising excitement, of the agitation of the servant who pursued her, saying he had orders not to admit anyone; it was as much as his place was worth. He even dared to lay hold of her sleeve. *She must not go in.*

She turned suddenly upon the man and asked haughtily: 'Is Colonel Dereham not alone, then?'

‘Oh yes, miss, he is alone, but——’ She shook him off, and opened the door.

* * * * *

It was the night after that scene of horror, that she understood better old Lady Peterborough, and her action all those years ago. She had sent Colonel Dereham to Boulogne, but not merely to checkmate Katharine’s Hill Street visit, not solely to keep the girl at her own side. Most of all, she had done it to shield Katharine from this knowledge she had gained at last, to keep his daughter’s eyes from seeing Henry Dereham as Lady Peterborough had found him that morning: ‘Only half alive, ghastly, opium-sodden.’

‘She asked him,’ Lord Peterborough told Katharine, ‘if he wanted to run the risk of your finding him like that. He had just enough wits left to pray her to avert the last sole degradation that had power to make him shrink. If he went away, he said, he could pull himself together. And she helped him to go.’

Katharine, swiftly reviewing the years, saw in what fashion he had kept his word—and understood other things as well, that had hitherto been hid. In spite of Lady Peterborough’s right about face after discovering that Waldenstein was still in communication with his wife, the girl had reproached her bitterly, beginning with the frustration of the Hill Street visit.

Katharine did her justice now, remembering how she had never defended herself from the charge of having instigated Colonel Dereham’s flight to Boulogne, for the purpose of serving her own frivolous and ill-starred ends.

‘What would you have done,’ Katharine remembered demanding at the height of her misery and reproach, ‘if Graf Wilhelm had not brought me down that night?’

‘Insisted on searching the place myself. It is never wise to force a man into incriminating admissions—far better to indicate his loop-hole of escape. But if Waldenstein and his cousin had not crawled out——’

‘What then?’

‘I would have pulled the place about their ears. There would have been little Ruh at Wilhelm’s.’ The old face looked out of the grave again. More life in it still than in the glazed, horror-haunted eyes of the man in Hill Street.

BOOK II

THE BLACK-MAGIC MAN

CHAPTER I

AFTER the protracted strain of taking Colonel Dereham to Paris, and establishing him in a private hospital for the cure of victims of the morphia habit, Katharine returned to Peterborough House very ill, and glad, on the whole, to think she was probably dying.

As she had done abroad, so now in England, to please Lord Peterborough, she saw more than one great doctor, who promptly discovered that that organ which he called his specialty was in need of medical attention. Several agreed that the action of the heart was not quite normal (upon which verdict the patient would smile ruefully in secret), and they were all of one opinion—that rest, and a fine variety of drugs, would ultimately restore her to perfect health.

In turn she obeyed the directions of each of these gentlemen, just as she had before obeyed those of various foreign advisers, and with precisely the same result, save that now she was slowly but steadily growing weaker. As month succeeded month, she saw how, given a certain tenacity, which most assuredly was hers, the body may maintain against the forces that make for its undoing, a resistance gallant and tragically long. Dear heaven! it was as hard to die, as it was to get well. It might take years—years in which she would lose little by little the last remnant of physical strength; looks (a vision of her father rose), perhaps even will and dignity, would go before she would be rid of this fast-clinging, unwelcome, inveterate life.

Obeying the doctors' orders, she went out very little—only on rare occasions to Lady Algernon's with Lord Peterborough, or alone to Blanche Bruton's now and then, or to hear a little music, or drive round and round the Serpentine on fine days with the frail old man, for whom she had come to feel a daughter's affection.

At the end of July they went to Scotland. September brought them South to entertain a houseful at Devon Court, and early October found them once again in London.

During the time in Scotland she had written a poem, to which she gave the name of the month just ending. It was really a good-bye to summer in more than the calendar's sense. The idea came up from the South, brought across the Highlands in a sack of the prosaic London post—a silver printed bidding to Dolly Weare's wedding.

That child a bride! How old it made one feel! It seemed as if everybody of Katharine's own standing had already married—now it was the turn of babes and sucklings. Dolly! Yes, after all she must be eighteen.

How chill this Highland air! There was a yellow leaf. Oh yes, summer is waning, and soon we'll be saying 'It is gone!'

She put her verses into the mouth of a woman who sees the summer end, without having felt it warm and quicken, a woman to whom the tradition of its teeming richness is a legend and reproach. Katharine signed her initials and sent the verses to an evening paper. The thought of that woman of her fancy who—unlike herself, as Katharine insisted—saw the summer dying without ever having seen it flame, the thought of her was much with Katharine in those days, helping her to bear her own less sorry burden. For worst of all, she told herself, must be to come to Autumn, without ever having known that Summer in the heart.

But here, too, in Devon, the imaginary woman haunted her. Katharine sang 'September in the South' as seen through eyes like those. And when October came, she shared the dim and tender days with this sister of the heart, who needed to be compassionated, this inarticulate one whose grief was eased by finding at last expression. Katharine began to get letters of wondering praise, and to hear of the Singer of the Months as a rare new

voice. She planned a Kalendar. Each month should give a leaf out of the woman's story.

The Brutons were back from a round of visits, and Katharine dined with them the night after her own return. She stayed on when the others had gone, talking with Blanche over the fire. Wilfred had rung to ask for his letters, and had gone away with them to the library.

'I've had a letter from Bertie Amherst,' the hostess said after a pause.

'Yes?'

'He complained you never wrote to him. He asked for news.'

'Dear old Bertie.'

'He doesn't seem as glad as other people that the war is practically ended.'

'Does he say that?'

'No, but he asks me what I mean by congratulating him on coming home. "I never get anything I really want," he says—"not even when it's a Boer bullet."

'Poor old Bertie.'

* * * * *

Blanche was the only one she ever allowed to speak to her of Prince Anton. She told her now of that last vision of him. How afraid she had been of meeting him. 'But I saw that night that I need never be afraid again.' For at last she had seen the real man. Seen the moral poverty of the creature; seen even the mere animal beauty, dimmed and coarsened. Something heavy and gross in the great figure and the wide face, that travestied memory. And yet memory at its best and brightest, what had it to reflect? This man's weakness, self-indulgence, and radical untruth. He had lied and lied; was lying to-day, would lie to-morrow, would be lying with his latest breath. 'And for that I have given my youth!'

But she shrank even from Blanche's comment, and interrupted her hurriedly: 'They, too! How they lied, all those people that were here to-night,' said Katharine wearily. 'Give me another cigarette.'

'Lied?' Blanche handed her the tortoise-shell box, and pushed the spirit-lamp across the polished top of the low revolving bookstand.

'Yes, don't pretend they didn't, or I'll lose faith in you.'

'They didn't lie about the stir your Kalendar is making. I've heard the most critical people——'

'They lied when they said how well I was looking.'

'Oh, that's a form of saying they're glad to see you again.'

'It's a relief that, with you, any gladness you may feel doesn't take the shape of uttering inanities about my personal appearance.'

'Well, you know, Kitty, you *are* uncommon good to look at even if——'

'If——'

But Blanche stirred the fire.

'——if I've no more colour than the tablecloth? If my eyes are pushed back in my head. If, in short, I'm ghastly.'

'Did you, after all, consult Dr. South?'

'Yes, eight weeks ago—with the result you see.'

'I've been wanting for some time'—Mrs. Bruton hesitated. 'Wilfred discouraged me. And I agree with him it's a great responsibility to advise anyone to give up one doctor and call in another, especially——' She looked at Katharine's listless face. 'But I've been longing to talk to you about a man who really is very extraordinary.'

Ah, how well she knew this preamble to the recommendation of a new doctor! She threw her cigarette in the fire, stretched her slim body till her satin toes touched the fender, and with both arms uplifted rested her blonde head in her locked hands.

'They say,' Blanche Bruton went on, 'it was he really who kept the Queen alive. She was far more ill than the public knew—tried all the usual things, and then, one fine day, to the horror and consternation of the Court Physicians, she sent for this——'

Katharine unintentionally marked her scant concern in the story by letting her hands drop suddenly from behind her head, and bending down to examine the delicate pattern chased on the little antique lamp. Blanche hesitated an instant, and then took a fresh start. 'Lord Danby, and now my brother Jim, *they* swear by him—and at him,' she added with a laugh.

'Why do they swear at him?' inquired Katharine, making her first feeble sign of interest.

'Oh, he goes for them so—so—— Says such things, my dear——' and she laughed again as she fitted another cigarette into a holder.

'What kind of things?'

'Well—a—don't Sir William McIntosh, and the rest, tell you, for instance, that a person with a heart ought not to smoke?'

'——not smoke a great deal, they say. But they smoke themselves, and they know——'

'Well, this man I'm telling you about says, no tobacco at all and no wine. And he gets into the most appalling passion if you don't do as he tells you. When he found out that poor Jim had smoked half a cigar, he made the most awful observations you ever heard in your life—(Jim wouldn't repeat *all*, he said). But when the doctor had unburdened himself thoroughly'—she laughed again—'he simply ran out of the room and downstairs, knocking over Lady de Winton at the door, and had driven away before Jim was sufficiently recovered to ring the bell.'

'Oh, he *did* recover under this treatment.'

'He got his wife to go and explain. She came back quite shaken, I assure you, and said he had told her he had people on his hands who wanted to get well—he couldn't waste his time on fools (oh, yes, he said fools), who apparently *didn't* want to.'

'And was that what cured Jim——? for I saw him at the Saturday Pop, looking——'

'He wrote a very handsome apology, my dear—*Jim!* Fancy! and promised to do everything he was told. They're quite friends now. And Jim's well.'

'What's his name? I can't think why I haven't heard of him.'

'Oh, you haven't been seeing people——'

'I've been seeing doctors enough.'

'They're the very last to tell you. They say there never was anybody so hated by the profession as this new man is. He isn't really so new. Everybody's been running to him for several years now, in spite of the anathemas of the other doctors. They won't—lots of them—won't ever have anything to do with you again if they know you've consulted——'

'I believe I'll go to him.'

'Do, dear. He's in Cavendish Square. Number—— I'll look it out for you this minute.' She stood up, her charming face full of hope and cheer.

'Could I write a note here?' asked her guest.

'For an appointment? Yes, of course.' Blanche was enchanted to find her friend less listless than she had seen her for long. She did not know that by operation of a survival of the old optimism, Katharine regularly went through this phase when a new doctor was in question, and paid for it, by a deep distrust after some acquaintance with his methods and his mind.

'I'll say "to-morrow if possible,"' she announced, drawing up the chair to the little writing-table, and choosing a pen, while her friend lit the two wax tapers. 'And I'll put in a telegraph form. Enough stamps?' She was looking in a box. 'What's the creature's name?'

'Vincent—Garth Vincent. What's the matter?'

'Oh, I used to know Garth Vincent.' Katharine stopped rummaging for stamps, and was staring at the candle-flame.

'You know him?'

'A little.'

'How very odd.'

'Yes, Lady Peterborough thought it "odd."'

'Where did you come across him? Abroad?'

'No. Here in London.'

'You consulted him?'

'No. He consulted me. It was a long time ago.'

She threw down the pen and stood up. Blanche took hold of her arm.

'What do you mean by saying he consulted you?'

'——said, as well as I remember, very much what I should have to say to him. That he was wretched—he'd tried everything, and had come to the conclusion there wasn't much to expect of life unless I could . . . give him hope.'

'He wanted to marry you?'

'That was what I gathered.'

'And you . . .?'

'I didn't give him "hope." And I've no reason to think he

could give it to me. It's too much for one human being to ask of another.'

* * * * *

What really prevented her from going to him was the sense of contrast. She had never seen him since those golden days.

And yet over and over again, after the talk with Blanche, she kept saying to herself, 'She is right. I mustn't give up trying to get well. That's like my father. I must go and consult some one . . . not *him*, of course. I couldn't possibly go to him. And so Garth Vincent is grown great!' She would look back to the old days and repeat: 'Oh no, not him! But I must see someone.' With that resolve she would go to bed, live somehow through the broken night, dogged by humiliating visions of her father, and by that galling sense of how alike they were, and how life had failed them both alike, utterly—utterly. Strength to meet the listlessness of morning came only with renewed self-admonishing, 'Go and get advice. There must be help in the world. You've only to ask the right man.'

But once again upon her feet, facing the practical side of the problem she could only ask, Who? who?—And from the answer of the moment, turn deliberately away.

After an interval occupied in a cruise in the Mediterranean, Prince Anton began to write again, when his return to Berlin had set his thoughts running in old grooves. Katharine returned the letters unopened. With the third she enclosed a line: *It is of no use to write again.* But he did. Not only wrote but telegraphed. These last communications, she would open unaware, expecting a bidding from Blanche, or message from Bertie, back again from South Africa. Instead of any such matter, she would find herself reading words above Anton's name, that made her white face flame with scorn—scorn for herself she would have said, or rather for that blind Katharine who was dead. Under the nervous strain, under the lash of these reminders of all she longed most passionately to forget, she felt the little strength she still had—going, going. 'Help!' she kept crying in her heart. 'Oh, who will help me!'

A morning came when as she said the words she looked in the glass. Stood aghast with parted lips.

'Natalie! My hat—grey toque! Thick white veil. Quick! Long cloak. Tell Howe a hansom. Quick!'

'Cavendish Square!'—and she was there before she realized she did not know the number. She hailed a passing postman. 'Oh yes,' he turned obligingly. 'Everybody hereabouts knows Dr. Vincent's number. It is forty-two—the house where the carriage is standing.'

Another victoria drove up at the same moment as Katharine's hansom. Slowly and with lumbering dignity a great closed carriage made way.

'Dr. Vincent is in?' Katharine asked of the man who opened the door.

'You have an appointment.'

'No. Give him my card.'

'If you haven't got an appointment——'

'Just take him the card please'—she swept past the dubious functionary, in the wake of the woman who had arrived in the smart victoria, and who had given her name with confidence. Not yet half-past ten, and there were already four people in the big dingy dining-room, that with London doctors does half of its double duty as a waiting-room for patients. It occurred to Katharine now, as it had done under similar circumstances before, to wonder how the man's family could endure to eat in a place consecrated for so many hours of every day to the use of the ailing and the wretched. Didn't the misery that unhappy mortals brought here, didn't it vitiate the air? Was it that that blurred the very window panes, as the light exhalation of the dying will cloud a mirror held to witness to the breath? Had not suffering and disease got into the very carpets and curtains of such places, mixing there congenially with the London grime? In any of these dining-waiting-rooms was there ever laughter and good cheer?

She looked about her.

The one male present held up the one morning paper, like a screen, between himself and the rest of the world. Three women, with listless hands turned over the few soiled and much-mauled volumes that dotted, oasis-like, the yellow-brown desert of the great dining-table. A massive bronze clock on a black marble mantelpiece, ticked with busy solemnity. As the time went on,

and people relinquished their books, either out of sheer weariness, or with a sudden access of cheerful alacrity, on being summoned to the consulting room, Katharine took them up in turn. A bound volume of *Punch*. A pamphlet on *Diseases of the Eye*. *A Guide to Cairo*. A novel by a never-heard-of-name, and a humorous American work wearing an air desperately shabby, infinitely sad. Two men came in. One went and sat in the farther corner, like a sick dog, who would slink as far as possible out of sight. The other affected a jaunty disregard alike of the dismalness of the errand that brought people here, and of the environment that awaited them. He walked about with his stick and his gloves held jauntily behind him, and looked at the pictures as if he were at a Private View in Bond Street. There were only three pictures and they were old, unless that little one in the bad light—Katharine couldn't make it out. Everything here was old. The whole aspect of the place was that of a house long lived in. The massive buffet was early Victorian, the carpet, curtains, everything was heavy and dingy and old. 'If I didn't know he was still young,' mused Katharine, 'I would take this to be the house of an octogenarian.'

She closed the tattered volume of *Punch*, and stared at the four glass vases, that huddled forlornly together in the middle of the table, carrying each its wisp of dejected-looking flowers—a few drooping anemones supported by stiff bits of ragged ivy. That anyone could believe that to be decoration! she mused. Anyone? Why it must be his wife who cherished the delusion. What sort of a woman had he married? A slattern at all events, she decided with her persistent French view of the untidiness of the average London house, the low standard of cleanliness and good-housekeeping prevailing among middle-class London matrons. She remembered vaguely the loud young woman who had flirted so obstreperously with Garth Vincent that night at Lady Wicks'. Was it she he had married?

The jaunty young man had been summoned. The sick dog still sat in the corner. An old lady came in with a girl, very pretty. Was she ill, too? Had that man Katharine had thought so little of in the old days, had he hope and healing for each one of this heterogeneous gathering? And it's like this every day—people sit here waiting with dread in their hearts, waiting for

Garth Vincent's verdict. Well, it was a queer world. She got up and went to look at the picture in the shadow. A child. A wistful, tender little face. If it was like the mother, then he *hadn't* married the horsey young woman.

The servant reappeared every ten minutes or so, carrying off some one, or ushering in others, who came and sat in the heavy leather-covered chairs, coughed, looked angrily at whoever was reading the solitary paper, turned over the shabby books and compared their watches with the big bronze clock. Katharine took up the *Standard* for the second time, thinking as she did so, that there was perhaps a validity that she would before have been disposed to deny, in the supposed connection between your slattern and your woman 'superior to the frivolities of Fashion.' The feminine portion of this establishment apparently did not patronize the lady's papers. There was not even an old one about. In the total absence of such literature, she discovered a difference between this and other waiting-rooms.

When Katharine had sat there an hour, she went into the hall and said to the man-servant: 'You took my name in?'

'Yes, madam. He said he would see you if you could wait.'

'Well, I can't stay much longer,' she said decisively.

But she went back and sat in the gloomy room till nearly one.

'Will you come now?' said the man, suddenly appearing.

She followed him out with the same air of eager haste that the others had worn. The servant opened the consulting-room door.

'How do you do?' said a hard voice; with the abrupt addition: 'I'm sorry to see you,' and she was shaking hands with the same dark man she had known in those different days. Although he stood with his back to the light and his face in heavy shadow, she was conscious of a change in it that was not the change of years. 'How do you do,' she had echoed and turned a little nervously towards the chair that faced his own, on the other side of a writing-table. 'Is this where the victims sit?' she asked with an affectation of lightness.

'Sit here,' he said shortly, and she went to the sofa near the window.

'Take off that veil.'

'Oh, of course.' She lifted her hand to unpin it, laughing a little embarrassed laugh, and as she let it fall she had an in-

stant sense of comfort in the better sight of his face. If there was change in her, so incontestably was there in him. But his was gain. And after a curious fashion. For it was the face of a man who had fought some battle fierce and bitter, who had been hurt in the battle, and who carried the smouldering memory of that conflict and that hurt for ever with him. What has been happening through these years? she wondered. But the speculation was gone in a flash, for he was discharging questions at her with the precision of a minute gun, and before she had been thirty seconds in his presence she felt three things. First, that she need not have minded coming. Second, that here was a man who gave and who demanded the naked truth. Third, that he was going to make her well.

But under hard conditions. When she had stood the fire of his interrogation:

‘You must go into a Nursing Home,’ he said.

‘That’s impossible.’

‘Why?’

‘It’s impossible because I want to get well. A Nursing Home would not do me any good.’ As he frowned the more and moved with impatience, she hastened to add with greater show of feeling than she herself realized: ‘I—I’ve seen in the past few years so much—my father has been ill—has lived in such places—and the taste left in my mouth is too bitter.’

‘Very well. Then I’m afraid I can’t help you.’

She stared. ‘Please don’t say that.’

He only laughed rather disagreeably, got up and held out his hand:

‘Good-bye.’

‘Oh, wait a moment. You see, the case’ (she shuddered: ‘I’m “a case” now’)—‘the case is a little different from most——’

‘They all say that,’ he interposed impatiently.

‘But here it’s true. You can make a Nursing Home of Peterborough House.’

He shook his head.

‘I’m not one of a big abounding family. There is a quiet, airy house, full of well-trained servants and, besides me, only a frail old man. He will agree to anything that will help me to get well. I can be isolated—absolutely isolated there.’

'It never succeeds,' he said, but she thought he was considering the proposition.

'We can make it succeed. You can impose any conditions you please. I pledge myself they shall be carried out.'

'There's a whole system, in the right kind of Nursing Home, that can't be transplanted at a moment's notice—if at all.'

'You can't suggest anything so difficult, but we will do it,' she persisted. Then as he stood with his head bent, brows drawn close together, silent: 'If you refuse to help me in my own home'—he looked up suddenly—'then there is left only Good-bye.' Not conscious of the tears that stood in her eyes, she held out her hand. He kept his right one in his pocket.

'It's against my rule.'

'You'll do it this once?'

'I'll make the trial, but I've very little faith.'

'You'll have more as we go on. Now, what am I to do?'

'Go home and go to bed.'

'Yes,' she nodded, waiting.

'Leave word that you won't see any visitors—not *any*.' He glared at her, suddenly furious, as if she had demurred.

'No—no—no one.'

'No letters, no telegrams, no messages, no daily papers, no communication of any sort for six weeks.'

'For six weeks,' she repeated like a child learning a lesson.

'I'll send you a day nurse and night nurse, and come and see you to-morrow.'

'Am I so ill?'

'Yes, you're rather ill,' he said sharply. 'You've had a shock of some sort, haven't you?'

'Oh—a——' While she stammered with surprise at his clairvoyance, he had put out his hand.

'Good-bye.'

And she was in the street.

CHAPTER II

NOT yet daring to tell Lord Peterborough what she had let herself in for, she secretly began her preparations—making them with a kind of excited deliberation, and the sense of pain that attends all such ‘letting go.’

For those two hours that she worked at her writing table, and at a certain locked bureau, she had from time to time the sudden sharp envisagement of life that visits those who drown, or those falling down to death from some great height. As she turned over notes, poems, photographs, she read a commentary on the wasted years not visibly set down—saw panoramic pictures of herself limned more vividly than by the sun; and all connected, finely related, effect following hard on patent cause. There was the little child in Paris, the school-girl at Auteuil, learning odds and ends of everything but discipline; the débutante bending before the old Queen at Buckingham Palace and raising her eyes to meet the smiling gaze of the man in the blue uniform; the disillusionment of the years; her father’s downfall; the sense of ruin and helplessness, and then that searching half-hour in Cavendish Square before the Judge who had sentenced her to prison. It was as if, until to-day, she had wrought at life like the tapestry-makers, on the wrong side of the fabric. And now on a sudden (since that thirty minutes under Garth Vincent’s hands) had been brought round in front of the great frame and seen the pattern fairly. The sight had made him, whose little concern it was, uncommon grave. He had asked her questions that to remember took her breath, yet that on the instant seemed as inevitable as thunder on the heels of lightning—questions that rent aside the trappings of existence and left bare the skeleton of things. He had not tried to comfort her, and yet strangely he

had done just that. How, she could not then have told. For although she believed he would help her, he had not spared the truth. And the truth was grave.

In any case six weeks was a long time. One never knew. She burnt a great many letters, and those she could not bring herself to burn, she sealed and inscribed 'in the event . . .'

Then she went downstairs to see if Lord Peterborough were back from his drive, and if he were, to make a clean breast. It was nearly four o'clock. She pushed open the library door softly, for he often dropped asleep after an outing.

'Well here you are at last,' he said, paraphrasing 'look how you neglect me!'

'I wasn't sure if you were back.'

'I didn't go.' He brandished a long ivory paper-knife over a new book.

'Oh! It has been such a nice afternoon.'

He said nothing, but went on sawing open the thick leaves with a hoarse grating sound.

'I hope it wasn't because I didn't come.'

'Oh, it didn't matter.'

'You wouldn't never take drives, would you—if I were not here?'

'Eh?' He looked up sharply under his bushy white eyebrows. 'Where are you going?'

'Nowhere. I'm going to stay here—but I shan't be able to drive'—a change in the whimsical old face made her add hurriedly, 'not for the next—little while.'

'Why not?' He laid the ivory knife in the last cut page and slowly closed the book, keeping his dim old eyes fastened on her face.

'It seems my nerves are shattered.' They exchanged looks that said Henry Dereham, and the old man frowned. 'I am advised to keep very quiet—for a little.'

'Humph, the last man said Exercise. Change.'

'I know. It didn't do. I'm going to give the Rest Cure a chance.'

His dulled hearing caught the blurred syllables together. 'Give what Rescuer a chance? Who is he?'

'Dr. Garth Vincent.'

‘—fellow calls himself a Rescuer?’

‘Oh, he couldn’t exactly be called a Rest Cure in himself. In fact he’s as far removed from being soothing as anyone I know, but——’

‘Oh well, if he rescues you’—— and he laughed.

Katharine joined him, relieved that he was taking the news so philosophically. ‘But while he’s “rescuing” or Rest-Curing me, you’ll have a lot of responsibility with my god-father,’ she said, leaning over the back of his chair. ‘It would interfere with the Rescue most dreadfully, if I didn’t have a perfectly quiet mind.’

Howe came in with letters lying in two neat piles on a tray. The correspondence was inspected in silence while the man mended the fire. Katharine glanced hurriedly at an urgent request from a high quarter for her to join a Woman’s Colonial Emigration Committee; a scolding for disappointing some people who had expected her the evening before; a wedding invitation; two dinners. Then she settled to read the letter she had turned on its face upon first catching sight of the superscription. It was from her father. A maudlin appeal for her to get him back to England. She dropped the untidy sheets on her lap and looked down on them through a mist of tears.

‘What is it, child?’ inquired the gentle voice of the old man by the fire.

‘Oh nothing,’ she answered, as Howe returned with a telegram. ‘After this, you’ll just put all letters and things aside till I’m stronger. This for me, too?’ She opened the despatch and read:

‘If you return my letters unopened I must come to London though M. is dangerously ill.—ANTON.’

Margaretha dangerously ill! ‘Give me a foreign form.’

She wrote: *‘Await my letter. Important you should not communicate before hearing from me.—K.’*

‘——and Howe, I’m not at home. Will you see people?’

‘No. Oh, Lady Algernon of course,’ Lord Peterborough added suddenly with a harassed look. He disliked his sister rather more than less as time went on—but the tradition of family affection

was more potent with him even than his love of peace. Poor dear, thought Katharine, left to Lady Algernon's tender mercies!——

'Won't you have some nice person to stay these weeks I can't be with you?'

'Can't be with me? Bless my soul! who will you be with then?'

'The doctor wanted me to go to a Nursing Home——'

'Stuff and nonsense! I never heard of such rank absurdity. Nursing Homes are for people who can't have proper attention in their own houses.'

'That isn't quite his view.'

'But it's *yours!*' he announced, yet with open anxiety.

'Yes, dear. It's mine.'

'I should think so indeed.'

'I told him there was nothing, just nothing, that couldn't be done for me here.' The old man nodded briskly. 'He said that people always said that, and then raised objections. His orders were not carried out, and then when people didn't get well they blamed him.'

'We won't give the fellow a loophole to crawl through. What does he want?'

'——wants me to stay in my own rooms with a day-nurse and a night-nurse.'

'Two nurses!' His voice fell. 'Are you as ill as that, my child?'

'No, that's the ridiculous part of it,' she said lightly. 'But he says after all this ineffectual "patching" we must do the thing thoroughly and have done with it.'

'What does he mean by thoroughly?'

'Well to diet—and take a Rest Cure—receive no letters or messages, read no papers, see nobody, be "isolated" as he calls it for—a few weeks,' she did not dare say six, as she watched the white brows pull together.

'Does the fellow want to relieve you of my exhilarating society?'

'I'm not to see any face I know, not even Natalie's.'

'God bless my soul!' He jumped up, his withered old cheeks suddenly flushed. 'I never heard such nonsense—shut a young woman away from all her best friends, from even her old servants!—How did you hear of this man?' Before she could answer Howe had opened the door and announced:

'Lady Algernon Caxton—Mr. Amherst.'

'Look here, Adeline,' in the agitation of the moment Lord Peterborough instinctively set aside private differences and summoned a family council: 'what do you think of this new-fangled notion of a Rest Cure? Some quack's been telling Katharine she won't get well if she doesn't go to bed, and bar the door against every human creature who knows or cares about her. What do you think of that?'

'Preposterous!' boomed Lady Algernon in subterranean tones. 'What quack?'

'Oh, some new man—what's his name?'

'Nothing very new in the prescription,' said Bertie, coming to Katharine's rescue. 'I know people who've tried it.'

'Who recommended the fellow?' Lord Peterborough asked Katharine, as Bertie released her hand.

'Blanche Bruton told me about him. Garth Vincent is his name.'

'Oh, I know him,' said Bertie; 'clever chap.'

'Yes, Blanche said he cured Jim Henley, and—oh, lots of people she knows.'

'Vincent's a first-rate man,' said Bertie with decision; but he looked at Katharine in a way that indicated 'There's more to be said than that; however, we'll leave well enough alone.'

'One thing I must insist upon,' said Lord Peterborough, 'and that is your seeing McClintoch first.'

'What for?' asked Katharine in dismay.

'Why, to know what he thinks of this crazy plan.'

'But I don't want to consult Sir Lawrence any more.'

'Why not? He's looked after the health of the family for five-and-twenty years, and understands your constitution better than anyone in the world.' Katharine's harassed look rested on Bertie Amherst as the butler came in, and said in an undertone, that a young person was asking for Miss Dereham.

'I told you I was not at home.'

'Yes, I said she'd better come another day—but she said she couldn't and she was sure you would see her.'

'What impertinence!' said Lady Algernon, ready as usual to manage other people's affairs. 'Who is it?'

'She says she's a nurse, your ladyship,' remarked Howe with his most detached air.

'Oh,' laughed Katharine. 'Of course! it's all right. Tell Natalie.'

'Already!' ejaculated Lord Peterborough. 'She must be sent away, Katharine, till we can get another opinion. I don't believe for a moment that McClintoch——'

'It won't do to ask Sir Lawrence what he thinks of Vincent,' said Bertie.

'Why not?—if Vincent's all right?' demanded his uncle.

'Oh, it would never do. If Vincent thought anyone consulted him, and then went to get another man's opinion——'

'Well?'

'Why he wouldn't touch the case.'

'You mean to say he would jib at Katharine's talking over such a step with a man who's known her all her life!'

Bertie shook his head and laughed. 'Vincent's a wonderful clever chap, but he's got the devil's own temper. He'd say if Katharine wants to consult McClintoch, let her stay with McClintoch. Why bother Vincent at all, if you don't believe in him?'

Katharine's grateful eyes assured Bertie he was on the right track.

'Why indeed!' said Lady Algernon in her deepest tones.

'Why should anyone go to an upstart doctor when one can have——'

'Young, too, ain't he?' interrupted Lord Peterborough.

'Young, and cocksure, and quite odious,' said Lady Algernon. 'Sets at defiance all his superiors in the entire medical profession—no respect for *anybody*,' she put up her nose. 'I wouldn't permit him to cross my threshold. Such manners! A perfect boor——'

'I never said he was an embodiment of all the graces,' observed Bertie.

'I didn't know it mattered in a doctor,' said Katharine.

'No, no,' answered Lord Peterborough reasonably. 'I won't say his manners matter. If the fellow knows his business, that's all Katharine wants of him.'

'Exactly,' said Katharine.

'All the same, I saw him at Sanford House last night,' said Bertie.

Lady Algernon's nose went up yet higher. 'Yes,' she said, 'you meet them sometimes in most unexpected places, in these degenerate days.'

'Them?' inquired Katharine, with a moment's stirring of the curiosity of the waiting room: what kind of woman had he married?

'Yes,' Lady Algernon went on, 'in my young days medical men were kept in their proper places. *Now*, the person who has been prescribing for your liver in the morning, may be peering into your plate at the dinner table. Disgusting!'

'Poor things, are they never to dine out?'

'Let them go among their own kind, as men-dressmakers and such people do. It is revolting to think of mixing in general society with a man you've had to consult about——'

'I can see,' Katharine quietly interrupted, 'that it may revolt them—if they remember.'

'Going about as they do,' the old woman went on imperturbably, 'there's no telling what mayn't happen. Some silly girl with new fangled notions, might even think she could marry a doctor just as though he were in the army or the church.'

The beautiful guardsman laughed. 'There's something in doctorin' that fails to appeal to the æsthetic sense of most women.' He looked at Katharine.

She smiled assent. 'Yes, it's not a romantic profession.'

'I should like to return to the times,' began Lady Algernon, 'when the professions of doctor and barber were combined in one——'

'I wouldn't,' said Bertie as the tea came in; 'you probably got hair oil now and then, as a pick-me-up.' He kept his seat by Katharine on the sofa. In an undertone: 'You'll write to me, won't you?'

'Write to you?'

'Yes, while you're lying up there with nothing to do.'

'I musn't communicate with anybody.'

'Oh, that's rot. You can easily do it without getting into trouble with Vincent.'

She shook her head.

'It isn't as if you were in that beastly Home of his. They watch you there like a cat watches a mouse. Dawlish was eight

weeks in the place. He told me if you sent a postcard——’ Bertie made a little gesture of the devil to pay.

‘The nurse discharged, I ‘suppose.’

‘——*and* the patient. Fact. But here you can do the Cure in moderation. Write to me, Kitty.’

She shook her head.

‘It’s to be exactly as if I were in the Nursing Home. I’ve promised him. It’s only on that condition he undertakes my case.’

Bertie sighed. ‘Come with me to the new Savoy opera to-night then, for a final fling.’

‘No, I said I’d go to bed—and I’m going.’ She rose. But Lady Algernon was taking leave, so Katharine waited for a last word with Lord Peterborough before disappearing from the general view. When they were alone:

‘So,’ he said, ‘you’ve determined to follow this man’s advice?’

‘I believe it’s good advice.’

‘Oh, you believe in the fellow, do you?’

‘Yes, I think he will cure me’—she spared the old man ‘if anybody can.’

‘Well, come, that’s something. You haven’t usually felt like that.’

‘No.’

‘I don’t like to think of my girl being given over to the mercies of an uncouth creature—— Adeline’s been telling me——’

‘What does it matter?’ Katharine interrupted with a weary smile. ‘I can quite imagine he doesn’t get on with people like Lady Algernon. And it’s true he *did* rather buffet me about. But all the same he was rather kind to me, too’—she stared in front of her—‘in the sort of way that the rain and the wind are kind.’ She looked up after a silence to find Lord Peterborough sitting with head sunk between his shoulders and eyes lowered. It occurred to her that he looked unusually old and lonely, and yet she must leave him for all those weeks!

She went over and laid her hand on his shoulder.

‘Please help me to do this Cure. Vincent’s right. It’s what I need. After all, it’s no more than many Roman Catholic women do from time to time.’

‘Take Rest Cures?’

'Yes, kind of. They turn their backs on the world, and go for a few weeks into a Religious Retreat—just for the refreshment of their souls.' She spoke lightly, and smiled down at him.

'Beastly bore for you.'

'Well, I don't know. I *am* rather tired, and I shall be able to lie in bed without reproach.'

'Did I ever reproach you?'

'Yes—you don't go to drive unless I come, and then I'm reproached.'

'Oh, I mean to drive when the weather is decent.'

'Yes. And I'll lie in bed and nobody will dare say I'm a sluggard. I'll do only the things I like, and be approved for it. Just rest and scribble verses now and then, and read, read, read. Peer, let's make a list! There are long delightful books that I've been promising myself to read for years and years. There's never been time before. You'll get them for me, won't you?'

He felt for the pencil on his watch-chain—making a list of delightful books was a thing he was good at.

'Do you know what I'd do if I had to take a Rest Cure?' he said.

'No, what?'

'I'd learn a new language.'

'The very thing! I'll learn a new language. What shall it be?' she said with something like enthusiasm.

'You say you want to refresh your soul—and we know, that "Wer eine neue Sprache lernt, bekommt eine neue Seele"—that might be even better than refreshing the old one.'

Katharine had a sudden vision of Vincent's forbidding face as he said, 'I don't mean any half and half business—I mean really resting.' But she played with the question to amuse the old man, declining Russian as too hard, and deciding upon Dutch 'because of South Africa.'

But in belittling the situation to Peer she had come to see it differently herself. By the time she had given her final directions to Howe and the housekeeper, she had begun to look forward with a quite unexpected equanimity to this time of seclusion. She ran back into the library with a step so light that Lord Peterborough looked up in surprise. 'Why, you're better already.'

Then, as, smiling she dropped on the footstool in front of him: 'I wonder if you really need this Cure——' He spoke wistfully.

'Yes, I need it dear, but it will be a success only if you are very kind.'

'What can I do, child?'

She laid her head on his knee, and he put a thin hand on her hair, repeating gently, 'What can I do?' Sudden tears came into her eyes.

'Be as good to my god-father as you've been to me ever since I was a little little child.' She was on her knees with arms about him. 'Will you drive every fine day, and do all the dull and healthy things?' They tried to laugh.

'Yes,' he said. 'Now go away and don't show your face here again till you're quite well.' She promised, still laughing, dried her eyes, and got as far as the door. Turned, and with a little difficulty finding her voice:

'I expect you think I've taken it all as a matter of course—but I haven't.'

'Taken what as a matter of course?'

'All that you've done for me.'

'Oh *that*——' with sudden energy he began to cut the remaining leaves of his book. But Katharine came back, quite calm again, and stood by his chair. 'I'd like you to let me say just once that I am grateful.'

'As to that, you've given as much as you've taken. What should I do alone?'

'No, no, you could get on without me far better than I could without you. Why, you're the only person in the world who has never failed me.'

'I have been very fond of you, my dear.'

But Katharine did not dream how glad she was to be that she had not let slip the occasion to make profession of faith.

As she went upstairs a double knock shook the heavy outer door. The sound affected her as it might the dweller in some impregnable fortress, who hears an impotent enemy battering at the gates. Freedom from the tyranny of the London hourly post, that of itself was much. No more notes to answer, no attack upon the quivering nerves by telegraph boys with messages from Berlin—no heart-breaking letters from her father. No

need to smile and look pleasant. No one to entertain. 'Hah—h——!' she drew a long breath as she stood on the topmost step. She had left Care below.

The nurse had been taken to her room. She must have heard Katharine come upstairs, for without delay she presented herself. Tall, gaunt—not young, a perfunctory smile, a cold nose, set off by the white aureole of her frilled cap, which gave the impression of being tied with excruciating tightness under her long chin. The starched muslin of the strings seemed to embed itself in the loose skin of the neck, and after doing its worst by way of discomfort there, launched out briskly in the wings of a stiff-tied bow. The small constricting cuffs looked ready to cut off each purple hand.

'I am Nurse Phillips,' she said.

Katharine responded and sent her away for tea. Twenty minutes later, Nurse Phillips re-entered the room with a proprietary air, as one now fully installed. Katharine was in dressing-gown by the fire, writing on a portfolio held upon her knee. The most difficult task she had shirked till the last, this final letter to Anton, explaining the exigencies of the Rest Cure, and that if he still went on sending letters or telegrams, they would either lie untouched, or be opened (in the event of anything happening to her) by other hands. That would give him pause.

'Shall you soon be ready to go to bed?' inquired the nurse hovering about.

'Yes.'

'Can you tell me where the scales are?'

'What scales?'

'The scales to weigh you.'

Katharine reflected. 'I believe there used to be scales in Lady Peterborough's bath-room. We can go there if you like.'

'Could the scales be brought in here?'

'Here?'

'Yes. Dr. Vincent won't want you to go out of this room.'

'Oh, won't he?' smiled Katharine.

'No,' answered the nurse gravely. Then as Katharine said no more: 'Dr. Vincent is very particular about having the weight taken every night before dinner.'

Life in one room! That will seem odd. Katharine reached out her hand and rang the bell.

‘Do you mind letting me know what you want?’

‘Oh, I’ll see a servant about——’

‘Could I say what it is?’ asked the woman.

Then as Katharine stared at her, she added, ‘If you’d rather not, of course, for to-night it won’t matter.’

‘——for to-night?’

‘When the Cure begins, you know—from to-morrow—Dr. Vincent won’t want anyone to come in after the room is done in the morning, except the nurse.’

‘——and himself, I suppose.’ She smiled a little impatiently.

‘Oh, yes—himself.’

A knock at the door. ‘Just give the order about the scales, will you?’ As the nurse disappeared, Katharine heard outside Natalie’s voice, a little excited and hushed down—Natalie, never before debarred that door! What a queer experience it was to be! She went on with that last letter to Anton.

‘*So, you see, for six weeks*’—she paused with a renewed sense of relief at being, for that much time at least, beyond the reach of his troubling power. ‘For six weeks!’ she repeated to herself, staring into the fire—‘nobody and nothing of all this tangled wretchedness can reach me. For two and forty days I shall be safe.’ She looked round her prison smiling. Why, it will be next door to being dead. I’ll have such peace here as I thought only graves could give.

And she re-read the last words of her letter: ‘*So you see, for six weeks*’—and wrote on—“*I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead.*”—KATHARINE.’

CHAPTER III

VAGUELY, as she lay there all that first morning, she expected to hear Vincent announced—forgetting, so little had the conditions of his life come home to her, that he would not be likely to come before his office hours, and would scarcely therefore reach her till the latter part of the day. Idly she cut the leaves of Jusserand's 'Roman d'un Roi d'Écosse,' but she felt too let down, even to begin that work, although the nurse gave her a momentary fillip by saying, 'Is he going to let you read?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Did he tell you so?'

'Yes, certainly.' Then presently: 'Don't most people read who take a Rest Cure?'

'He sometimes lets them. It depends.' After a moment spent in poking the fire: 'I don't know so much about cases in private houses. It is very seldom he consents to take a real Rest Cure patient that is not nursed at the Home.'

'Oh?' and although she knew quite well, 'Why is that?' she said.

'Because,—well you see, at the Home everything goes by rule, it's all like clockwork. He thinks that people, especially women, haven't enough sense of discipline to carry out orders for themselves.'

'I suppose he doesn't imagine everybody to be the same in that.'

'People are helped, he thinks, by being hedged in by the routine of a house where everything is organized for the purpose of——'

Katharine interrupted, recoiling from the thought of her father: 'In cases where people don't need to be hedged in, and

have the will to carry out reasonable instructions, it is surely better to let them exercise it.'

'Oh, if they have it,' was the unconvinced reply.

'Even in the Nursing Home, I suppose people sometimes rebel against the regulations.'

'It's no use to rebel there.'

Katharine remembered the soothing letter she had written to her father while the nurse was at breakfast. She had not purposely concealed it, but it lay out of sight between the leaves of the 'Roi d'Écosse' awaiting its stamp. She recalled vaguely something Bertie had said. 'For instance,' she pursued, 'if people at the Home write letters——?'

'They aren't posted.' Then while Katharine lay digesting the information, the nurse added: 'And if Dr. Vincent hears of their having written——' she paused to dust the little Dresden figure.

'Well?'

'Oh, at the Home, he just comes in, and tells the patient to pack up and go away.'

'Hm! and do they do it?'

'No, they want to get well, and they know they can't without his help. So they give in and promise not to break his rules again.' As Katharine made no comment upon this, the nurse added: 'Dr. Vincent told Sir William Blake' (she brought out the name of the Chancellor of the Exchequer with less effect of importance than she managed to convey in saying 'Dr. Vincent') 'that he wouldn't waste his time on anybody, no matter who it was, who didn't give the treatment a fair trial.'

Katharine mentally decided to say nothing about the letter she had just written, and upon the first opportunity to burn it. But how was it with her father? Ought she to have disregarded his doctors, and hers, and have gone to him? Would the right kind of daughter have responded to his half-mad appeal?

She turned and tossed, but the question followed—or was varied only by others centering about Prince Anton. Had the Princess Margaretha died? If so, would Anton after a decent interval feel himself free to treat honourably at last—and would he, with his bland lack of conscience, refuse to see that it was too late? Was it indeed too late—or was it only sickness made her

feel it to be so? 'My father'—'Anton'—'Anton'—'father!' In spite of saying: 'I shall not get well if I dwell on such disturbing themes,' the battledore of her mind sent up first one and then another of these shuttlecocks, wearily received it back, and sent it flying only to catch the other again. And so on, hour after hour, jaded, sick in every sense, she played the weary game.

Again at luncheon, as last night at dinner (when Katharine had put the error down to nervousness), the nurse laid the silver covers off the dishes on the bed; upside down—but the steam or grease was like to run down on the coverlid, and in any event the very sight of them there was an offence. Katharine asked to have them removed.—'There's no other place,' said Nurse Phillips, 'every place here is covered with bric-a-brac.'

'Ring the bell, and tell them to bring up another small table.' And so it was that, early in the day, the nurse had discovered Katharine to be 'fussy,' and the patient had seen the nurse to have 'shiftless ways.' After luncheon the blinds were drawn, and Katharine left to repose. In an hour Nurse Phillips was back, pulling the silk into thick folds again, and letting in the grey afternoon.

'I am cold. Will you ring, and ask my maid for a thick woolly dressing-jacket—a pink thing—she knows.'

'Yes,' answered the nurse in a preoccupied tone, folding up a towel.

'Anton'—'my father'—'father'—'Anton——'! Oh, to get away from memory!

'And I'd like,' Katharine went on aloud, 'my patience cards from the drawing-room.' She had already asked for them in the morning.

'Oh, yes,' said the nurse remembering, 'I'll get them just as soon as——' She was bustling about, tidying the room.

'Just as soon as what?'

'After Dr. Vincent has been.'

Ah! thought the patient, the cause of this sudden fervour for neatness stands revealed. And so began for Katharine, that focussing of all life's forces upon a little daily routine. She smiled condescendingly upon her growing absorption in the trivial—saying to herself that it was as if an eye that had looked through field-glasses, up at towering Alps, and down on armies contend-

ing in the plain—had suddenly been set to peer at life through a microscope. Well—this was the great world, too. Perhaps after all only intellectual snobbery could deny it significance. And then she smiled faintly, as she watched the nurse smoothing the tumbled coverlid, picking up a thread off the big Persian rug—and looking back at the fire. Katharine's eyes followed every movement, as the blue-gowned figure bent, and pulled the bearskin a little to the right, and then turning again, swept patient and apartment with an eye narrowed, alert, to see that all was ready for the great man's fit reception.

Idly the woman in the bed wondered about the woman moving in the room. How little Katharine knew of her as yet. Nothing save that she had a naturally keen desire to please the man she worked for, and that in common with the majority of English nurses her neatness was superficial. Colonel Dereham's and Lady Peterborough's illnesses had shown up the fact that few English nurses, even among those best born, have got beyond the vulgar fear of being classed with servants—therefore that part of their duty which is traditionally 'servant's work' they slur and scamp, quite in the fashion of the least admirable of the class they are most desirous to be differentiated from. To watch Nurse Phillips dust the room was to lie and long to jump up and show her how. She shared the conviction of the lower class Londoner, that to clean a room was to stir up the dust in it—at most to remove the dirt from one quarter to another. Katharine had tried, that morning, to convince herself that this was a matter quite trivial beside the great question of good health, or even beside the hardly lesser one of good feeling. Although she longed to have her own well-trained people about her, she determined to set aside the feeling, to find out and make the most of the best in this stiff spinster, that she must come to know so well before their relations ended. What was it like to be a nurse? To see people only at their worst? Had she ever cared for anyone, this chill-visaged Nurse Phillips? What kept her going—faithful to a life so unlovely and so scantily rewarded? Just now she seemed a prey to restlessness—went in and out between bath and bed-room, and made frequent excursions into the hall. Katharine heard whispering in the passage about the jacket. For no discoverable reason, as the nurse returned, suddenly the sick woman remembered that day with

Anton at the Polo match. The nurse made a rattling among the toilet-bottles and the glasses. Has that woman ever been to a Polo match? The idea was somehow ludicrous. Hers was the grim and dingy world of drugs and doctors.

When finally she came to the bedside with a pink bundle, she unfolded it with some faint show of surprise.

'Is this what you sent for?' she said, as she eyed its plainness.

'Yes.' Katharine slowly pulled herself into a sitting posture.

'Shall you put it on now, before the doctor comes?'

'Yes—it's warmer.' Then laughing: 'You think it not smart enough?'

'Oh, *that* doesn't signify,' said the other, 'though most patients don't realize how very little it matters to a doctor what they have on.'

'Do they make smart toilets sometimes?'

'Very,' and she smiled for the first time. 'I had a patient once who was very untidy, except on the days the doctor came. Then she would put on a yellow silk gown embroidered with topazes—a wonderful affair. She did look well in it, too,' Nurse Phillips added grudgingly. 'And another used to do her hair in great black puffs all over her head, and sit bolt upright in her bed for hours, so not a hair should go wrong till after Dr. Vincent had been.' With a feeling of scorn for such feminine weakness, Katharine, exhibiting a sudden energy, flung off the long flimsy silk gown with its froth of white lace, and threw it in a heap at the foot of the bed.

The nurse caught it up, and while folding it hastily (not as Natalie folded things!) she glanced sharply about, as though to assure herself nothing, besides this, was obviously out of place. In the act of shutting the wardrobe-door, she looked around with an assumption of deliberation that somehow, to the sensitive woman in the bed, betrayed more nervous concern than frank exhibition of excitement would have done. As she stood listening a second with head thrown back, Nurse Phillips said softly, 'That's Dr. Vincent, now.' It was not till a few seconds later that Katharine was aware of the sound of fast driven horses brought up suddenly, and the sharp attack of shoe-iron on the asphalt of the court underneath her windows. But to Katharine the sound meant Anton, and a drive through sunny streets hung with green and

white Saxon banners; a coach brought gallantly up to the porte cochère of a new house in an old park, where a battle had been fought, and where Lady Peterborough had checkmated the boldest of the Prince's moves.

While she recalled those hours, she had been dreamily feeling for the sleeve of the woolly garment—the nurse pulled it quickly within range, went to the door, returned and very low she said:

'He is running up the stair,' and therewith vanished.

'He' is running up the stair? Ah no.

Almost instantly a knock not loud but sharp.

'Come in.' He entered with her words, not waiting for them.

'Good morning'—a different apparition from Anton the golden. A swarthy lowering face, a figure businesslike, alert, compact of the very prose of life, or set to the tune of utility as soldiers' feet to a march. He had come swiftly in, seemed not even to look at her, went straight to the nearest window, already down an inch from the top, and pulled it open a foot and a half. 'You're too hot in here,' he said, and stood an instant taking a stethoscope out of his pocket and fitting it together, frowning down upon it. Katharine was conscious of a little shudder passing over her.

'I shall be cold with so much raw air streaming in on me,' she said.

'It doesn't stream on you—streams towards the door.'

In that quick way of his, that yet was so unflurried, he came over to the bed, pushed aside the white enamel chair placed for him, and sat down on the delicate rose coverlid.

'Breathe,' he ordered. 'Breathe again! Again!'

He withdrew the stethoscope, unscrewed it, and still with that fixed frown he said: 'The first thing you've got to do is to stop starving yourself. It's absurd your eating a continental breakfast.'

How had he learned in the second outside that she——

'I can't possibly eat a great heavy meal early in the day.'

'Yes, you can. You've got to.'

'I haven't done it for years.'

'You've been running down for years.'

'Well, at all events I must have my first cup of tea before my bath.' Then as for the first time, apparently, he looked at her, she smiled disarmingly: 'What do you think that nurse brought me bright and early? *Hot milk* before I got my eyes fairly open.'

'That was right.'

'Oh, I assure you——'

'Didn't you drink it?' he glowered.

'Well' (laughing a little), 'the nurse seemed to think it was such a matter of life and death——'

'So it is.'

She looked at him, but there was no smiling in his face.

'She wanted me to drink a great jorum at ten o'clock last night, too.'

'Quite right.' He turned abruptly to the fireplace, and stood staring at the pictures an instant. Katharine knew as well as if she had been inside his head, that he had been arrested for that second by the water colour of Prince Anton, brilliant in Prussian blue and gold lace.

'I don't like milk,' said Katharine meekly.

'What has that to do with it?' He wheeled back upon her, but as her eyes searched his face, she could not tell whether he was looking at her or not. He seemed never to want to look at her, and yet it was his business to.

'... How can I drink milk so soon after dining?'

'How soon?'

'Oh, we have dinner like most people at a quarter past eight.'

'You must dine at seven.' She opened her lips, but forbore to say how dreadfully it would upset the servants. She knew the answer to that: Then you must go to a Nursing Home!

She sacrificed the servants' equilibrium without a qualm.

'Your business is to eat, and sleep, and not to think,' he said glancing towards the fireplace, and (Katharine could have sworn) at Anton's picture.

'You said I might read?'

'Yes—trash.'

He picked up a book on the low table at the bed's head.

'*Poetry!*' he said derisively and dropped it. '*That's* not the kind of trash I mean.—Read novels, novels without any "problems" in them.' He was making for the door.

'You haven't given me any medicine,' she half sat up to say.

'Yes, I have. Milk,—mutton—oh, you'll be given medicine,' and he laughed suddenly, with an air of dour malice, as he shut the sick room door.

'Humph! odd creature,' she mentally ejaculated, and then began the treadmill round: Father—Anton—the wasted past, the unlit future.

While Katharine was having her first frugal tea under the new régime, Nurse Phillips sat in the chair Vincent had thrust aside a couple of hours before, sat there silent save for the remark:

'Butter and cream are very good for you.'

Then presently as Katharine seemed to take no notice: 'Dr. Vincent will expect you to eat at dinner all the butter you leave now.'

The patient smiled at the solemnity of the warning: even faintly curious.

'What would happen if I disappointed him?'

'He would probably come round.'

'Come round.'?

'Yes.'

'Come *here*? again? to-night?'

'Oh yes.'

Katharine lay and idly considered the matter. 'How would he know I'd——'

'I should have to telephone him.'

'Did you ever have to do that?'

'Oh, yes.'

'What happened?'

'He is always in one of his black rages, when he's sent for.'

'What good does being in a rage do?' inquired Katharine with some dignity, but spreading the butter thicker on the toast.

'All the good in the world in some cases. Patients will say they can't possibly eat any more. I've explained, and begged, and done all in my power. They say, to save their lives they can't swallow another morsel. I tell them, in that case, it is my duty to ring up Doctor Vincent. They say it doesn't matter if I do. It doesn't matter even if he comes. They seem to count on his not coming, but' (she shook her head, with a grim smile, as who should comment silently on the vanity of human hopes) 'he does come—looking like, well—he isn't pleasant at such moments.'

'——What happens?'

'He goes in and shuts the door.'

'Well?'

The nurse made a little awkward but eloquent gesture with her purple hands.

The shutting of the door was probably not followed by manslaughter, so: 'What do you suppose he says?' asked Katharine amused, interested.

'Oh, we don't know what he says—he always sees his patients alone.'

'Aren't you told afterwards?'

'Not usually.'

'But—but what do you suppose——'

'If it's a woman, she's generally crying when I go back. Even the men seem rather unnerved—but,' with a little laugh in which triumph subtly entered, 'the plate is always clean.'

'I'd rather like to see him in one of his rages.'

'No, you wouldn't,' interrupted Nurse Phillips with conviction.

'Ah, well,' said Katharine. 'I dare say he won't show that side here.' She spoke with the easy assumption of the woman who, much as she had been lied to, had never in her life been treated rudely.

'I wouldn't depend on that,' observed the nurse.

'Depend on what?'

'On his being any different here from elsewhere. He's exactly the same to everybody. Royalty and all.' As Katharine looked at her she had a glimpse of a new source of satisfaction to the infinitely various human mind. This gaunt woman by the fire was accessible to something very like pleasure, not far off from pride, in truth, at the spectacle of fine ladies brought under the law of the master she herself so zealously served. Of no avail their arts and wiles—their rich trappings and high-sounding names. That they were all one to Garth Vincent, gave the very English mind of the nurse, her moment of high equality, which otherwise she could not attain—gave her at times even an uplifting sense of superiority. For she, the nurse, was a sort of Grand Vizier to the Great Mogul—through him she touched the springs of life outside her sphere, through him laid hands on Power. If he ruled her with a rod of iron, he left a fragment of that harsh sceptre in her hand, and in her arid days some of the heady joy of playing despot—irresistible to one who had looked at life only from beneath. Nurse Phillips was naturally a silent woman—

indeed, it was that quality, coupled with unswerving obedience, that had secured to her a permanent place on Vincent's staff, but to Miss Dereham she talked. While Katharine dined that night she again put questions that loosed the unready tongue.

'We had a very beautiful woman at the Home once, doing a modified Rest Cure, Miss Nina Bellair——'

'Oh, the singer?'

'Yes, and after a fortnight she wasn't any better. So the Doctor said: "Put flesh on that patient." Her voice had taken on something of Vincent's brusquerie. "The first day that she had a 4-ounce luncheon (4 ounces of mutton, 4 toast, 4 vegetable, 4 milk-pudding), I was called to the telephone a moment, and when I got back, I was astonished to find she'd eaten all her mutton so quickly. I went out to bring in the pudding, and met the Doctor.'

'Vincent?'

'Yes, Dr. Vincent,' and Katharine from that hour needed not to ask again who, of all the medical profession, was 'the Doctor.' 'He'd been sent for to see a man in the Home who was bad. I passed with my patient's clean plate just as he—Dr. Vincent—came out of the opposite room. "Did she eat it all?" he said. "Well, I suppose so," I answered—for it's as much as your head is worth to make the least mistake with *him*. He'd call it lying. He told one of the nurses, once, that all women were natural liars.' She smiled, curiously, as at some endearment. "'Don't you *know* if she's eaten it all?" he said. So I told him I'd had to go to the telephone a moment. He was half way downstairs as I said the words, but he turned back and called out "Bring the rest of her luncheon," and he was in my patient's room like a flash of lightning. When I got there, he was walking up and down talking about the place he'd been to for his last holiday, but I could see that his eyes were darting everywhere. He stared at the fire, told me to put on some coals, and, while I did so, he looked far back in the scuttle—went to the window, and examined the pavement and the gutter—and all the while he talked about Herzegovina. While the last of the pudding was being helped, he took the tongs, and put them a little way up the chimney behind that iron flap—you haven't got it here, but you know the kind of draught thing I mean. I saw my patient stop, with her

last spoonful half way to her mouth. I looked round, and Dr. Vincent was holding out with the tongs a slice of mutton an inch thick, powdered all over with soot.'

'Well?'

'Oh, I fled out of the room.'

'But what happened?'

'The pudding plate was very sooty,' she said, getting up with her grim smile.

'You can't think the woman ate a piece of meat that had been up the chimney?'

'I don't think Dr. Vincent ate it.'

'Disgusting of him to make the poor thing——'

'No, it was just what she needed. She was very spoiled and difficult before. No more trouble after that. She got fat and well. Married now, you know, and has a baby.'

'I consider that a most revolting story,' said Katharine, plastering the butter thick on her last mouthful. 'He'd made a great mistake if he supposed such treatment would succeed with every patient.'

'He doesn't make many mistakes.'

'Probably he thought that anybody weak-minded enough to hide the meat, could be coerced into eating it. How exceedingly silly to refuse food until he comes and lectures you!—no wonder he has a poor opinion of women.'

The next day at eleven a masseuse knocked at the door.

'I didn't send for a masseuse.'

'Dr. Vincent sent her.'

'But I don't want massage——'

'Dr. Vincent always insists upon massage in a case like yours. Come in please, Miss Gillies.'

'A case like mine.' Did that doctor-man think it was so easily classifiable—my case? Had he, in the purblind fashion of his profession, so lightly diagnosed and docketed her strange and complex quarrel with existence? But here was the big Scotch-woman with a form of treatment Katharine had often tried, and especially disliked. It had never soothed, but seemed rather to excite and irritate her. She did not belong to the cat tribe—it is not *any* hand that can help these highly specialized senses—and it is this that men (in only a few of whom the same sensitiveness

exists)—it is this that they forget, or have never realized. For Katharine Dereham to be touched by strange hands was an offence to the spirit, a positive hurt to the nerves. For such people, massage may be a hindrance rather than a help to health. It was something, that she should instinctively have liked the big, raw-boned, fresh-coloured woman, albeit she hated the office she was there to perform. Katharine quickly made up her mind to submit 'just for to-day' in order to preserve, before his subordinates, the air of conforming to the Doctor's commands. It was like a man to prescribe massage as a matter of routine!

Katharine, who had lived too much with men to share the frequent feminine delusion that they were utterly different from women, had not waited until now to feel that such slight difference as she could verify, came uppermost in their apprehension of things of sense. A man is able to divorce satisfaction of the body from satisfaction of the mind; with the highly civilized woman they are one. No man feels the same wonder and amaze that strikes so sharp upon a woman, when she hears of a man's dalliance with serving-maids at home, or abroad with Asiatics. If a woman looks below her station, her heart and mind will make some sort of shift (often strangely successful) to follow after her eyes. She cannot, unless she is wholly base, find the joy she looks for, on any other terms. Even for health or service, physical contact, except with those who are dear, is an oppression and a horror. That women of Katharine Dereham's type are inaccessible to bodily benefits unless they come in special guise, is a part of the complex work of civilization. Garth Vincent, with all his cleverness, would not understand. Still she would tell him, when he came in the afternoon, that, however it might do in other cases, massage was bad for her.

She kept her eye on the clock as the hour drew near, made a pretence of reading—but was really revolving in her mind how she would put this objection to, this rejection of (she firmly amended), a part of his treatment that he 'always insists upon.' Three. Ten past. A quarter. She took another book. Half past. Four. Oh, of course he can't always come at the same time. I'll have my way about the massage. Four-thirty. The nurse brought tea. Katharine hurried through it that she might not be in the middle when he came. Still no sign of him. Five-

thirty. Six o'clock. She began to feel rather angry. He was neglecting her for someone else. 'Does Dr. Vincent ever come as late as half-past six?'

'Oh yes, if he has been prevented from coming earlier.' But the nurse was putting the weights on the scales. 'Will you let me take your weight now?' Katharine listened for the sound of his horses' hoofs upon the asphalt. Nothing. As she was getting back to bed, 'I suppose he won't come now,' she said.

'To-night! Oh no. He hasn't time to see any one patient more than three times a week—unless they're worse or send for him. Then he rushes in for an instant.'

And she had watched and waited hours for the creature! Yes, she felt distinctly angry. But she did not realize that it was the first day for years, that she had not thought of Anton. The first night that he, or her father, had failed to haunt her pillow.

* * * * *

On the occasion of Vincent's second visit the following day, he came in like a jocular ogre, saying 'Now I want some of your blood. We'll see if you're as anæmic as you look.' He washed her middle finger with an antiseptic that made it cold as ice. Then he stabbed the pink tip with apparent satisfaction. 'Hurt?' he said, with a grin, as the blood answered. The little glass beak of the tiny tube drank the red bead greedily, and held it in a scarlet thread. But he did it four times, and when she winced he smiled.

'Anæmic!' she said—'is that what makes me look such a fright?'

'It's partly that,' he said, accepting her description without a qualm. And then with that look of *Schadenfreude*, she was coming to know, he glanced up from some occult proceeding at the table. —'Your type fades early in any case.'

She felt the words quite as much as he could have wished, but she presented a smiling front.

'What is the type that lasts best?'

'Brunette, of course. A dark eye may be bright at eighty.' He had let his own flash across the face upon the pillow. Then quickly, as if to forestall any mistake in her mind as to what he found there,—'Of course, any woman who is a walking skeleton looks older even than she is.'

Even than she is! Heavens! the creature talks as if I were fifty!

'Good-bye.' He was gone—and the nurse was there gathering up some things he had left on the table, and putting them into a black bag. And she had forgotten to say she wouldn't have massage! So she had it—and she had it twice a day.

'Did you tell him about your neuralgia?' asked the nurse.

'No. I thought you would. Don't you tell him everything that he ought to know?'

'Yes, when I can get him to attend.'

'When you can get him to attend? Why, he *must* attend. That's what he comes for.'

The nurse preserved a non-committal silence.

'It's much better you should tell him details, than that I should. But it's quite necessary he should know.'

'Everything goes down on the chart.'

'Does he always read the chart?'

'He usually glances at it—but he reads the patient. He can tell more by looking at you than most doctors can by cutting you open.'

'That is pure superstition,' returned Katharine, nettled not only by the crudity of the phrase. 'I don't care myself to tell him sick-room details—and then he's always in such a hurry—besides, it's far better you should. You know how to put them.'

'I tried to get hold of him to-day to speak about your wanting coffee. I ran down the first flight trying to explain, but he wouldn't take any notice.'

'I shall ask him the next time he comes to be good enough to answer my nurse——'

'Oh, *please—Please!*' Her consternation was comic. 'You won't do that—it would be the ruin of any nurse.'

'If I asked my doctor to listen to her reasonable questions about her care of me? Preposterous!'

'Oh, he does listen. Don't imagine he loses anything that's said.'

'How do you know?'

'It always turns out so. He never seems to look,—sees everything—doesn't listen, hears everything.'

'Then, why didn't he answer about my having coffee?'

'It was an answer, you see.'

'His saying nothing?'

'Why, yes. You haven't had it.'

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The next day, in the ten minutes before he was due, Nurse Phillips went about the room folding up towels, putting slippers out of sight, and altogether fidgeting about in a way that she seemed to reserve solely for this particular hour three times in the week.

'Oh, you needn't be so particular,' Katharine said at last. 'His own house is not so immaculate—— Have you ever seen his wife?' she asked suddenly.

The nurse stopped and stared. 'His wife? He is not married.'

'Oh, isn't he?'

'No, he has nobody but a little invalid step-brother—a cripple—that he's devoted to. Dr. Vincent has all sorts of great people asking him to their houses'—Nurse Phillips spoke with an air of personal pride—'but he never disappoints that sick boy. A patient of mine, a well-known society-woman, once told me: "We know now if he says, 'I've promised to dine with my brother,' it's no use saying another word.'"

So he had not married the horsey young woman! Katharine was not foolish enough to believe it was for her sake he had been so long single. She knew the world better than that. Women did such things, not men.

But why had he——?

CHAPTER IV

SHE was reading a little volume that Anton had given her, during the days of enchantment in Rome—an exquisite diamond edition of Dante's sonnets—when Vincent appeared, chart in hand, and on his lips the words: 'Well, how's *this* patient?'—setting her in the pigeon-hole of her affliction, roughly stripped of individuality, labelled only, a disease. By a deliberate emphasis, too, underscoring the pitiful commonness of her plight. With that quick step of his, all day long, he was in and out of sick-rooms—this, one of scores.

She laid the white vellum volume down, keeping her finger in the place, and said 'Good-morning' with an easily discernible access of dignity. If nothing of this escaped him, he made no sign.

'I have forgotten to tell you before,' she said, 'that massage doesn't agree with me.'

'How do you know it doesn't agree with you?'

'By the after-effects.'

'What are they?'

'Overfatigue.'

'Oh, that isn't the massage—that's the foolish life you've led.'

'But it frets me to—to'—she was losing her temper—'to be pawed about.' He only laughed. 'I don't want any more of it,' she said.

'You've got to have it,' he said shortly.

'No, really, it does me no good, and I dislike it extremely.'

'By God, if one got only what one liked in this world!—you'll find you won't like plenty of things,' he assured her encouragingly.

'But I——'

He cut her short by throwing the chart down on the pink cover-

lid, and he took the little volume out of her hand. Looked at it suspiciously, and ejaculated, 'More poetry'—as if he had caught her taking opium. '*Italian*, too,' he added, as though this betrayed a blacker depth. He threw the book on the table. 'If you want to give yourself a chance to get well, leave sentimental rot alone—for six weeks, anyhow.'

'You may not care about it yourself, but poetry has helped many a sick person——'

'Never helped anybody,' he retorted angrily. 'The Poets are responsible for a lot of harm—filling women's minds with foolishness, encouraging their weakness—blinding them to reality. I tell you your only chance is to let the ideal alone and be an animal for a time. Eat, sleep, and leave sentiment to fools.'

'I'm not sentimental.'

'Oh, aren't you!' he rapped out.

She shook her head with an inclination to laugh, rather than be angry. 'You think I am, because you've heard I write poetry.'

'I've read some of it!' he snorted.

'Oh!' she blinked, confounded. 'But one can write poetry and yet be quite sensible.' He sat lowering. 'I am.'

'——are what?' he demanded, not looking at her.

'Quite sensible,' she answered seriously.

'Well, let's see!' he tossed the challenge out.

She half sat up, and laid hands on the chart.

'That's not for you.' He took it from her with scant ceremony. Then, as the caprice seized her again, to laugh up into the lowering face, he shot a look at her that quenched her sense of the comic as he said harshly: 'There's nothing ideal about your present circumstances, I can tell you that!' He took a blue paper out of his pocket, spread it open on the chart, and looked at it a moment. 'This is your first analysis. Nice reading!'

'What does it say?'

He threw the paper on the rose-silk coverlid. 'You can look at *that* all you like.'

She took it up. 'What does it mean? I can't understand these words.'

'Lucky for you,' he jeered.

'Is it a very bad report?'

'Rotten! Rotten state of things.' He waited a moment to give her the full benefit of the good news, and then took the paper back, and smoothed it out under his slim brown fingers, that seemed no part of his vigorous, essentially masculine frame. 'We have here,' he spoke like a professor demonstrating before a class, 'a pasty-faced subject——'

'You mean *me* ?'

'Yes. Haven't you looked in the glass?'

Anton! she mentally apostrophized with a little gasp. *Hear him!* shades of all who have spoken women fair—since Eve first knew she was in Paradise by words on Adam's lips!

As he sat with his black look bent upon the paper, she hesitated between hysterical laughter and downright anger. Of what use to be angry with such a creature? With a sort of grim gusto he was uttering his few bald phrases, about the poverty of her blood and her generally deplorable state.

'I knew you were ill, but I didn't know how ill.' Katharine was grave enough now. 'If you hadn't come in that morning——'

'What would have happened?' she said very low.

'You'd have had a bad breakdown.'

Suddenly all the horror of those days and nights before she went to him—suddenly it all came rolling back, threatening to overwhelm. Had she been having only a little respite here, lulled by some curious hypnotic quality in the man who had set himself to try the experiment of saving her? What did he really think of her chances? She had no fear that he would lie. If he could be induced to say he believed she would get well, she would know it a thing long ago appointed, fixed by Fate, unalterable, secure—that she should find health again. But in putting the question, she had the sense of running a ghastly risk. She was not so ready to die as she had thought—and death was far from being the worst that might befall. Could she bear the truth? For if he should be doubtful it would mean the worst. If he were to hesitate an instant, it would mean 'thumbs down.' But if he could be got to say all would be well—why, then, 'not all the angels in heaven above, nor the devils down under the sea,' could tear that certainty away. Oh yes, she had been, as he said, on the brink of a bad breakdown, that morning she had hurried to Cavendish Square.

'But you *did* come in,' he said after the pause, getting up suddenly as one who has dealt exhaustively with his subject.

'Wait a moment.' She sat straight, and held up a detaining hand, as he was making for the door. He never halted, but turned his dark face over his shoulder. '*Shall I get well?*' she said, dropping her voice to a whisper as he flung open the door.

'Of course you'll get well,' he answered, speaking louder than usual,—'if you do what you're told.'

And she heard him running downstairs.

Before Nurse Phillips brought into Katharine's room any of the many flowers sent the patient by her friends, she carefully abstracted the notes. So that except for Anton's roses, which always came on Thursdays, and needed no labelling—with that sole exception, Katharine had no idea who was remembering her and who forgetting. 'Was no card sent up with these?' she would ask at first, feeling an oppression at the menace of a name—at the thought of anyone, even thus symbolically, penetrating her retreat. But the gaunt nurse would stiffen her thin body, and say with the air of a school ma'am checking a froward pupil: 'Dr. Vincent prefers the names not to be given.' And again that curtain, that had trembled, moved an instant, as if a hand were in the act of sweeping it aside to admit the horde without—again at Vincent's sharp command, it fell softly down between Katharine and all the world, thick, motionless, impenetrable. Nestling secure under the coverlid, Katharine smiled.

'You will get all the cards and notes when you are well,' added the nurse, as if to forestall complaint.

'When did he make that rule?'

'Oh, before I began to nurse for him.'

Katharine was even disappointed that she might not regard it as a precaution specially invented for her safe-guarding. More and more she secretly hugged the sense of having someone to keep the big roaring world at bay. But that did not prevent her from now and then affecting some concern for the thing she was cut off from.

'Is there going to be a General Election?' she asked Vincent one day.

'Looks rather like it.'

'I shall never catch up! I suppose all sorts of things are happening? . . .'

'Not that *I* know of. Beastly weather! You're lucky to be in bed such a day.'

He left her with the feeling that had grown and grown, as of one on board ship in the middle of the ocean. Imagination at first was always going back to the moment of leave-taking—not only of persons, but of material means of communication. There had been the usual last moments when letters were hurried on board, telegraph-boys rushed back and forth, messenger-boys with 'Express' notes and flowers—friends ran up and down the gangway. Then the thousand threads in an instant severed, the whole of life cut off, and you swung out to sea. But the image dissatisfied her now. She replaced it by a picture of herself in a moated house set upon a hill-top. Many roads leading up, and all full of people, all bound for the hill-house. On a sudden Vincent had ordered the drawbridge up and no soul could pass. They stood baulked, making appeals from the far side of the moat. Vincent shook his head; they turned away and vanished. And Vincent had gone round the high-perched house and cut all the wires. These were, mysteriously, not telegraph and telephone alone, but sentient avenues of emotion, as well as of practical communication. Each man and woman who had established anything like close intercourse or intimate understanding with the lady in the hill-house, each one in her life who 'mattered,' had woven a thread from the innermost seat of his consciousness to the innermost seat of hers. And each upon his string—each one pulled and played, until Vincent had gone all round the house and cut them every one.

She had a distinct vision of the ends of these cut threads and wires hanging limp, relaxed, over the moat's high wall. And, oddly enough, the fancy brought her a more perfect rest than she had known. This was what he meant when he said 'isolation'—bless him! No pulse of that swift current that throbbed round the world could reach and electrify Katharine Dereham to pleasure or to pain. Yielding herself up to the blissful sense of detachment and quiescence, she saw, as a non-combatant might see from afar, through the dust and smoke of a distant battle—saw better than the men who fought, how the conflict tended. In

calling modern civilization 'Progress' men were proud. What more civilized than this constant 'going forward'? What had the Nineteenth Century struggled for more than any other gain? What had it achieved for the million? Enormously increased facility for 'going forward.' And where men could not go themselves, they sent their spirit—through the penny post or flitting ghostly over wires. Movement, Progress—were they indeed civilization? Had the Nineteenth Century marvels of locomotion and intercommunication—two sides of the same shield—had they made men better friends than the elder world had seen? Had they made tenderer lovers—or strengthened the family tie? Hardly. Were the nations closer drawn? Yes, for competition, hatred, conflict.

That din of many voices, Intercommunication, and its twin horror, incessant Locomotion—these it was that had given the world a new aspect, and mankind a new disease. Neurasthenia had the foremost nations in its grip. How could it be otherwise? as Vincent said. People spend more and more every year on mere movement. In the old days, even your fine gentleman, if after his college days, he made the Grand Tour with his 'Governor,' did his travelling once and for all. Now the European 'trip' is not a matter for once in a lifetime, but for once a year. In this fever for movement the rich lead, but the poor follow hard. 'Cheap trips' to Brighton and to Margate, and season tickets to places nearer by, keep the lower classes almost as much on the jump as Egypt, India, and Japan do the leisured few—the difference is merely in the length of stride, not in the essential unrest.

'What has your life been?' Vincent arraigned his patient. 'How many years since you were sixteen have you stayed in any one place?' Not a twelvemonth, not six months, spent in a single spot.

'Where do you live?'

'Why, in London—and at the Peterborough place in Devon.'

'Just as if a body could occupy two places at once! That's the heart of the trouble. You are always pulling yourself up and leaving some of your roots behind.'

'Haven't *you* a place in the country?'

'Yes, and the minute I can afford to stay there you won't

catch me in London, let alone scouring the Continent. But you You are in Paris a month or two out of every twelve. At Easter, Rome or the Riviera. August finds you in Scotland. Whitsuntide——’ He motioned impatiently, as if to say: I can’t follow such a will-o’-the-wisp. ‘And as if that sort of teetotum arrangement were not enough, late years have seen the development of the week-end country-house visit. Movement, movement—until the only way to save your lives is to catch hold of you and clap you into a Rest Cure. But what good! The minute you are out——’

‘No, no; I’ve learnt a hard lesson,’ quoth Katharine, smiling ruefully.

‘Not a bit of it,’ he growled. ‘Are you well? Then it’s: “Let us go to Monte Carlo and play . . . to St. Moritz and skate.” Are you ill?—off to Nauheim; Marienbad. Any time, any excuse; only let us go, go, go. The very phrase for breakdown is “not able to keep going any longer.” And the poor body’—he had glanced at the thin outlines under the rose coverlid—‘whose tap-root is in the soil, is dragged up from its native heath every few weeks, hauled about from pillar to post, shaken and whirled in motor-cars, jostled on the railway, tossed about on the sea.’

He sat still and glowered while his patient mentally filled in the outline. Even ‘at home’ one’s whole ill-used system was kept a-quiver; beat upon by fierce lights; hourly jarred by the postman’s knock—shot through and through by electric currents—no safety even behind the barrier of the Sea. Cabled at, telephoned to, whirled through space, and stuck as full of the darts of modern Civilization as any St. Sebastian is with arrows.

‘And yet there are many like me,’ said the low voice from the bed, ‘quite ready to sit down in some quiet country spot and never leave it.’

‘Humph! How long do you think that mood would last?—anyone who has lived like a Dancing Dervish!’

CHAPTER V

At the end of the first week of her incarceration, Katharine was distinctly better, at the end of the second, less well. She had her own view of the cause.

‘Nurse Phillips!’

‘Yes.’

‘You must tell Dr. Vincent how bad this massage is for me.’

‘Don’t you think it’s just at first?’

‘No. I’ve tried it off and on for years. It’s always so. You can see the ill effects for yourself.’ No answer. ‘Can’t you?’

‘I can see you seem very tired after it,’ she admitted. ‘But I suppose he has some good reason for——’

Good heaven! the woman’s imagination balked at the bare notion of anything of Vincent’s ordering not doing ultimate good.

‘There can’t be *any* intelligent reason for increasing my nervousness and my pain.’

The nurse made a little non-committal hitch of one shoulder and spread her cold hands.

Katharine kept her eyes upon her. ‘You surely don’t think he never makes a mistake.’

‘I suppose he does; but I’ve never seen it.’

‘Well, at all events, you must please tell him the massage does me no good, but actual harm.’ As the woman made no rejoinder: ‘You won’t forget?’

‘I’ll tell him that you say so.’ While Katharine digested this in silence, the nurse went on: ‘It won’t be any use. He will only shrug his shoulders, and rush downstairs.’ As she saw her patient’s eyes flash she added, ‘But if *you* tell him——’

Katharine did not think it necessary to say that she had tried

that and had failed. 'Please remember not to lean against the bed,' she said wearily. Nurse Phillips went and mended the fire. After handling the dusty if not actually dirty shovel and poker, she proceeded, without washing, to put away Katharine's clean linen just come from the laundry. As her fingers, purple outside, and witnessing to London grime within, touched the dainty things—'Oh, don't!' cried the patient. 'Do wait till you've washed your hands.'

'I can't be always washing.'

'No; I realize that. But at least put on gloves when you attend to the fire.' The nurse sniffed up disdain through her cold nose. It was the first time there had been anything resembling a passage of arms between them. But the nurse's ingrained untidiness troubled Katharine unceasingly. The patient had had little experience of the average London woman's early relinquishment of the struggle against dirt, her acceptance of a compromise which habit has brought her to regard as cleanliness. She forgot that it took an army of well-trained people to keep Peterborough House in its habitual condition, and that this woman had been brought up in circumstances where true cleanliness was too expensive to be attained. Twenty times a day the nurse did things that Katharine would have dismissed any servant in her employ for doing a second time. And yet she tried to overcome her sense of discomfort—tried to blunt her perception of it. Once, indeed, she did say something about it to the masseuse. Miss Gillies had come in promptly as usual, and instantly turned up her sleeves preparatory to washing her hands. 'I am not able to have massage to-day,' said Katharine.

'Oh!' Miss Gillies looked as disappointed as if the lost benefit were her own. 'Have just a little—arms and neck.'

'No. I can't stand it to-day.' Then suddenly, 'I should think you'd be delighted.'

'Why?'

'To be let off.'

'Oh, I don't care to have time left on my hands'—and she asked professional questions. Katharine, a little amused, answered her.

'Just let me see if I can't help that pain, will you?'—and

soon she was hammering away at poor Katharine quite in the usual way. It was that day the sick woman confessed to being tortured at the nurse's untidy ways. Miss Gillies nodded comprehendingly. 'Londoners are usually durrty,' she agreed. 'And the ordinary English surrvant!' She fell to beating the unhappy patient as though Katharine were a prime offender. 'The average house is filthy,' she said, pausing an instant, with her high colour several shades higher still—'simply filthy. And if you tell people that, they don't know what you mean. Once a year they have what they call their spring cleaning. Good heaven! we have it in Scotland once a week.'

'Don't come this afternoon, Miss Gillies,' said Katharine faintly, turning over after her final punishment. 'I simply cannot bear it twice to-day.'

'Has the Doctor said so?'

'No; but I'll explain.' As Miss Gillies shook her head: 'You're an odd woman. Are you honestly not glad sometimes to have a holiday?'

'I preferr to do my wurruk,' she said sturdily, her burr coming out stronger than usual. 'I like to see my patient getting on.'

'Well, you needn't come any more to-day.'

'I must come unless I have Dr. Vincent's orders not to.'

'I'll tell him I was too weak.'

Miss Gillies' face was anxious. 'Don't look so cast down,' said Katharine, laughing.

The Scotswoman shook her tawny head. 'Wait till ye see what the Doctor looks like. But I'll be herre at fourr, and hope ye'll be betterr.'

When Vincent came, Katharine told him with a light-hearted air that she had urged Miss Gillies to take a holiday.

'Why?'

'Because you are going to let me off massage,' Katharine smiled appealingly—then, seeing his face darken: 'She wears me out, Dr. Vincent.'

'Tell her to be more gentle.'

'It's not a question of gentle or rough. If I have it at all, I'd rather have it hard.' He had not been in the room thirty seconds but he jumped up, saying: 'You can't do without it.'

'Then once a day.'

'No; twice'—his hand was on the knob.

'Please, *please* once.'

'Twice!' and he was outside.

She felt unequal for the present to further contest on the subject. And besides, after all, she told herself, he must, with his wide experience, know better than she. When she could carry her increased pain with help of that conviction, she had already travelled farther than she knew. But it was true that certain of her old bad symptoms were gradually yielding to his treatment. He would make all well before he was done with her, if, as he himself had said, she 'did as she was told.'

The next time he appeared, Katharine knew he had heard from the nurse outside that the last medicine had not had the desired effect, and that the patient grievously missed her morning coffee. Katharine meant to put in a plea herself if the nurse should have failed, but as she watched him silently screwing together the two ebony pieces of his stethoscope, she was struck afresh by something in his air to which she could not give a name. It was suddenly as if she had never seen him before, and just as one looking on a new face for the first time gets an impression sharper, and somehow different, from anything that one can commonly recover after custom has blurred the salencies—just so she had an instant's perception of how he would have struck her had she never seen him before. *That's* how he seems to people! she thought. It was because I had known him before, that I didn't see him so, that morning I went to Cavendish Square. Didn't see him properly at all. But now—— Following out her new impression: 'Does that black stick of yours help the incantation?'

'The what?' (She laughed.) 'Nurse! Bring me the prescription-book.'

When the woman had gone, 'It isn't medicine I want,' said the patient.

'What *do* you want?' he asked, as though he hadn't been told outside.

But instead of saying coffee, the patient answered: 'Magic.'

'*What?*'

'Not medicine, Magic is what I need.'

‘Then you’ve come to the wrong man.’

She looked at him curiously: ‘I’m not so sure.’

* * * * *

And still from time to time, as the days went on, she made clutches at her old judicial frame of mind. She saw that the idea of Vincent himself lending the smallest countenance to any hocus-pocus, even to a good end, was unthinkable. He would have covered with ridicule the notion of a doctor’s having any so-called ‘occult’ power. Nevertheless, she told herself that he had cultivated the legend of his fierceness and his hardness, so that he might impose on the imagination of patients belonging almost exclusively to the class of the pampered and the over-self-indulged—people who had to be terrorized into obedience and harried into health. She remembered the instance of the great painter, Aubrey Church. He had told her himself, the night after that first talk with Blanche about Vincent, how he had held out through months of agony against going to the man, and finally rushed to him one day, only to stop on the door-step, and, recalling afresh stories he had heard about him, turned about, and went back home with his malady, rather than put himself under such a man. So the legend had its unsalutary side. But she could see plainly now, how with many it must give him a huge initial advantage. She was even conscious how the very thought of being herself treated to the rough side of his tongue had kept her more than once from speaking her mind. She knew there were certain limits beyond which if he should step she would have to dismiss him. Things that other women had had to suffer at his hands she would never tolerate. The more important, therefore, not to cross him—since, like those others at ‘the Home,’ whose diet was frequently humble pie, she had come to feel: without his help, I shall not get well. And yet, careful as she had been, he had spoken to her with what she felt acutely to be an unnecessary crudity about certain details—seeming almost (or did she imagine it?) to take a malicious pleasure in calling this hitherto inaccessible lady, down from the clouds, to answer his blunt interrogatories. It was as if he waited for her to wince that he might pounce upon her. It would almost seem as if he laid traps for weakness, and stood ready to jeer if she were caught.

One day, as he was about to test the action of her heart, she, upon a quickly repented impulse, held the coverlid tight across her breast a moment, and as he pulled it away impatiently, she turned her head aside with an involuntary long breath.

'What are you sighing about?' he said roughly, as he turned the coverlid down and gleamed at her between half-shut, moody eyes.

'I'm not sighing,' she said, with more fortitude than truth; and she knew he was disappointed that she gave him no chance to say to her, as he had said to a woman who had made a protracted struggle under similar circumstances: 'I knew you had a feeble body, but I had no idea you were feeble-minded too. You evidently can't imagine how absolutely uninteresting these matters of routine are to a doctor.' And, indeed, to do him justice, he seemed to try to convey this indifference in time to save his patients from error. Never could disembodied spirit have brought less of the flesh to the discharge of duty than did Garth Vincent. It was the more credit since he was intensely man. But in his work, the keen, untender eyes were all for symptoms; the fine brown hands touched warm flesh as coolly as they would have pressed a rubber water-bottle.

'Do you go into every sick-room looking as if you'd rather murder than cure the patient?' Katharine asked him one day.

He grinned with the momentary satisfaction of one who sees himself appreciated. 'If I had my way,' he said, 'I'd give sick people a certain time to get well in—if they didn't do it, I'd have them strangled.'

'Oh no, you'd strangle them yourself. You'd like that part of it.'

He nodded amiably. 'I'd begin with the babies. I wouldn't give the weak ones a chance to grow up and cumber the earth.'

Katharine remembered the little invalid brother, and felt sure he did not guess that she had heard of his existence—or of the bond of kindness said to exist between the two. 'After all, you're not a Hercules yourself,' she said aloud, recalling things the nurses had said about his overworking and his headaches.

'No,' he retorted. 'I ought to have been choked in my cradle.'

'I'm very glad you weren't,' she said quickly. His half-shut eyes seemed to search the wall for Anton. Katharine felt a renewed impatience with the picture. Why did he seem to notice it so often? Or did she only imagine that he did? No, she felt that he realized now, how little she liked to be reminded of it—perhaps even knew she forebore to send it away only because that would be to emphasize its having been there.

* * * * *

Although she could not move Vincent on the subject of massage, she did by degrees regulate Miss Gillies—though it was not altogether easy. Fortunately, the masseuse was an intelligent woman, though her interests were not varied. They closely skirted her profession, and by degrees it was apparent to Katharine's clear sight, that they centred in Garth Vincent. Not, it would seem, in any sentimental fashion, but as a study and a standard. This fact was brought to the surface by Katharine's criticism of him. Indeed, Miss Dereham was learning far more of her medical attendant than most of his patients did, and from two aspects of one fact: her vague unformulated fear of falling under his influence, and her perfectly conscious shrinking from even seeming to do so in the eyes of the nurses. The insistence of this double motive made her affect a lack of faith she was daily farther from feeling. Her deliberate expression of incredulity and dissatisfaction, not only brought out the loyalty of Vincent's subordinates, but gave their enthusiastic defence of him, an air of professionalism that they could feel cloaked the strong personal element. And so, as the days went on, these women, shut up there together, played at a kind of intellectual hide-and-seek. Katharine, under cover of criticism, more and more prompting them to stories of his miraculous cures—his blunt and, to their sense, clever sayings; the nurses firing their own hearts, while they could honestly think they were only inspiring the patient's with a salutary confidence. Very adroit Miss Dereham became in drawing the women out—guiding them from any point of the compass to the one topic they handled with a depth of feeling they strove in vain to hide, and an eloquence they did not guess.

Having discovered in the pretty little night-nurse that same combination of fear, and worship of Vincent, that Katharine

had so quickly detected under Nurse Phillips' dryness—she said to the masseuse one day:

'It is really comic to see the state of awe these nurses are in. I asked the little young one last night to go and cut out the Honours list from the morning's *Times* and bring it in to me. He lets me read, you know.'

'But not daily papers.'

'No. The Honours list isn't the daily paper.'

'It is news.'

'Oh, the very mildest form of entertainment. But she flatly refused.'

'Of course.'

'It wasn't of course at all. You're not so hopelessly under the spell; *you'll* get a yesterday's paper for me.'

Miss Gillies shook her head. 'Oh, if you are afraid to, I'll promise you Vincent shall not know.'

'I couldn't, really.'

Katharine spent ten minutes in trying to break down the woman's resolution. Something of Vincent seemed to have entered into her. Katharine might as well have talked to the bed-post. But the big brawny Highlander talked readily enough of *his* Honours, though they were not listed. This and that hopeless case he had brought round. How just in the past two years his practice had grown so enormous, that he was in danger of breaking down his own health in carrying it; how he had now to charge, besides his invariable big fee, a guinea a mile extra if he went outside a certain small radius; how she had just come from a patient he had visited that very day at two o'clock—and *that* patient was a person of discernment and some humanity. She had said to him: 'You don't look well.' 'Oh, I'm well enough—I haven't had luncheon.' 'Why not?' 'Hadn't time to-day,' he said.

'That's simply silly of him,' contributed Katharine. The heavy face of the woman lightened with a sudden quick gentleness.

'They call him hard. And nobody denies his manners are atrocious. I've heard people say he is cruel. The fact is, he neglects himself rather than them.'

As she was going out that evening Katharine called after

her: 'I know why you none of you dare let me see the Honours list. They've given Vincent a knighthood, and you're all so silly about him, you're afraid I couldn't refrain from congratulating him, too.' The Scotchwoman laughed. 'No, he isn't Sir Garth yet—and he may never be, he makes too many enemies. But they can't prevent him, all the same, from being *the Great Doctor Vincent!*' She nodded and went out.

To the pink-cheeked night-nurse, Katharine that same evening, spoke of the girl's home, 'far away in Wales.'

'I was once among those mountains—it's a lovely country,' said the patient, with the impulse to bring the place nearer to the girl's homesick sense. 'Oh, you know it?' and she beamed. 'Have you seen Marion Tregethan's pictures of it?'

'No.'

'No? She is very famous. She had a picture in the Academy two years ago. Miss Tregethan is a near neighbour of ours, she said with innocent pride. 'But she has been so ill.'

'What has been the matter?'

'Well, one doctor said one thing and one another.'

'What did Vincent say?'

'I begged her for months to go and consult him. But she had just had to settle some awful debt of her brother's—and she supports her mother, you see. She felt she couldn't afford to pay a great specialist's fee. One day I—I was so unhappy about her, I thought she was dying, and I just went to see Dr. Vincent.' She stopped breathless, as if she expected demonstrations of astonishment from the patient. 'I told him about her.'

'Well?'

'He said he couldn't possibly advise without seeing her. "Send her here," he said. I explained that she wasn't well off, and that she worked for a living, and how clever she was, and how—— He cut me short: "Send her along." I thought, so did she, that he meant to make a reduction in his charges. He treated her for months, and cured her, and wouldn't let her pay a penny. Oh, he *is* good, in spite of all they say. Just let them ask Marion Tregethan!' Suddenly she lowered her voice from its note of triumphant admiration to something close on reverence. 'Marion

has seen him with his little step-brother,' she said, almost under her breath. 'One day she had waited so long to see the doctor—the room was crowded, and it was quite the end of the morning—after one o'clock, and the hours of consultation were over. So poor Marion put on her things and was going home. But in the hall she fainted. The servant called Dr. Vincent, and he brought her round. But he wouldn't let her go away—made her have some luncheon. "My brother is here to-day," he said. "We are going to the country together this afternoon." And Marion found in the dining-room, when she went back, an invalid-chair, with a boy lying in it, looking about seven; but he's ten or eleven. And—to see Dr. Vincent with that boy—well, Marion cried when she told me about it, so I suppose that's why I'm so silly now,' she said, brushing her hand across her pretty eyes.

'Doesn't the invalid brother live with him?'

'No, he wants to—but his mother won't let him. Dr. Vincent doesn't want her, they say—but he cares about that boy—oh, he cares! She was his father's second wife, and she isn't friends with her stepson—awfully jealous of the way her boy worships him. Dr. Vincent has done everything for them. They have very little but what he gives them. They used to live all together, but Dr. Vincent would rather be alone. He's all by himself in that big house.'

'No doubt he has plenty of friends.'

'No, Marion Tregethan says there isn't a lonelier man in England.'

* * * * *

He came in one stormy night at six, and sat down heavily—in the chair this time. It was a sign he might not hurry away so soon, and Katharine's spirit rose.

She had learned now that if she talked of her pain, or indeed of herself at all, he would get up and march out. For the last two visits she had said nothing of symptoms, leaving him to learn what he might from nurse and chart. But to-night: 'How did you sleep last night?' he said.

'Well.'

'H'm! It's more than I did.'

'What kept *you* awake?' He shook his head, and picked

up a long chain of hers lying on the table by the bed—a little enamelled reliquary was attached. He laid the heart-shaped box in the middle of the chart as he said: 'I often don't sleep, when there's a case that isn't going right.'

'Have you such a case now?'

He seemed to ward off any slightest danger of a professional confidence—'and like everybody else I sometimes lie awake just because I'm miserable.'

'Miserable? *You?*'

'Yes, of course. Everybody has his hour, from time to time. Mine comes pretty often.'

'It ought not.'

'Why not?'

'Because you have the two best things that can fall to the lot of man.'

'What are they?'

'Work that you love, and people who pin their faith to it.'

'That never made anybody happy.' He was winding the long jewelled chain in circles, round the reliquary, as it lay in the middle of the chart. His head was bent, his look intent on the pattern he was making; all about the man an unusual quiet, almost absent-mindedness. Katharine held her breath as one might, seeing a sleep-walker passing unaware through peril. Controlling her voice to a low, steady cadence, she said quietly: 'What does make people happy?' And still staring at the gleaming chain, 'Love,' he answered. She lay very still. She had heard the word from the lips of a good many men, but she had never heard it with that accent. No gentleness in it—no shred of tenderness, personal or impersonal, was left about the vexed and ill-used word. It came out naked, bare, bleeding, like a new-born child with a cry—but far enough from a wail, for he had brought the single syllable out on a note of low defiance, as one speaks the name of one's enemy as well as one's desire. It struck Katharine that 'Love' should always be said just so. It had thrilled her like the finale of some great tragic poem. And he was like that, after all—this man.

Hard upon the heels of the thought came a quick revulsion. He was trying her. Just as he had tried her endurance of bodily pain, he was putting her sore heart to the proof. Was he think-

ing of the German officer above the fire? Whether it was an ancient grudge against her, or a newer grievance against all the tribe of ailing nervous women, or pure insensibility, it was certain he was constantly testing her against the cold steel edge of his own strange character. The remembrance braced her. 'Why,' she said quietly, 'you are more sentimental than I.'

'That's not sentimentality,' he said doggedly, 'that's nature.' And she felt rebuked. He had the advantage that truth may be trusted to confer.

An angry dissatisfaction with herself seized her, as he straightened up and laid her chain back upon the table. Hitting on the first thing she could think of to detain him: 'One moment before you go. I've given this massage a fair trial, and it has done me downright harm.' He frowned. But before he could answer: 'Look here,' she appealed to him, 'I've done everything—but *everything* you've advised——'

'What else are you here for?' he threw in.

'I deserve that you should treat me like a reasonable being.' Now, as ever, when she talked to him, he kept his eyes religiously away from her face—if they were anywhere but smouldering under the half-closed lids, they rested on the features of Prince Anton. 'I don't want—I should hate to go contrary to your advice——'

'You have only,' he interrupted roughly, 'yourself to please about that. I don't imagine it matters particularly to anybody else.' It was very brutal; it was so nearly true. What great difference did she make in the world to any human soul? If she had been ignorant before of the fact of her little actual account in the scheme of things, these weeks of death in life would have demonstrated how little evil would be wrought in any life should she go out of the Saga. Even Lord Peterborough had done well enough without her—she was convinced of that, since he had never made a sign. But penetrated as she was by sudden pain at his words, she did Garth Vincent justice in her heart. He had said that only because he had been betrayed into a moment's confidence a little while before—confidence which she had met so ill. It was on his part a movement to redress the balance. She had deserved what she got.

'But the fact about Miss Gillies is,' Katharine went on cour-

ageously, 'that good masseuse as she is, I should be better without her.'

'It's damned nonsense!' he said, jumping up and going to the fire, where he stood apparently scowling frightfully at Prince Anton. "'Better without'!" he echoed. 'Maybe you think you'd be better without me,' and he wheeled suddenly round.

'Oh no,' responded the patient faintly.

'There's no use in my wasting my time here,' he made for the door, 'if you're going to treat yourself.'

'No, no,' said Katharine, half rising in her bed. The threat of being given up by him—why did it suddenly seem the last irretrievable disaster? She did not know why—but she was at the mercy of the feeling. 'I was only joking,' she called out as he reached the door.

'I'm glad to find you so cheerful,' he said in his most dour fashion.

He passed Miss Gillies on the stair. She came in with a brisk 'Good-evening' and set to work.

CHAPTER VI

As slowly Katharine began to adjust her mind to the new order—this being dependent for everything, from creature comforts to high courage, upon a person who never spared her feelings, and yet in some way conveyed to her that he was her friend—she found herself more and more occupied, absorbed by the strange character of the man. What had made him like this? She knew as well as if she had lived these years at his side, that he had suffered. Partly, no doubt, for his own sins, but very much, she was convinced, for those of others. Life had used him hardly. The Welsh girl he had befriended had said ‘there is no lonelier man.’ And all these gossiping subordinates of his had said that it was true. Lonely! In London. At the very zenith of a brilliant career. Lonely! Why was anyone lonely? Because one could not accept life’s second best. She herself had been lonely in that cause. But, after all, women were known both to need companionship more and to be more fastidious about it. There were men, of course, who were by nature celibate. That was not Garth Vincent’s case. No observer could be in an instant’s doubt on that subject. But men the reverse of ascetic, the most self-indulgent, they, too, remained unmarried. No foolish lifelong search after perfection kept *them* lonely. They were pleased only too readily and too widely. But what was the truth about such people?

A short-sighted self-indulgence blinded them to the fact that to avoid the closer tie, to avoid responsibility, is to lose the finer essence of human companionship. You cannot get the sweet alone of anything in this life, and at the same time get the best. Even the grosser souls realize, in the end, they have let the best go by, though they do not know at which of life’s turnings they

have missed it. If you will have only the gaiety, the youth ever renewed, of changing relations, you will find yourself in the middle years without those assurances and sanctities that are born of faithful living through days evil as well as good, beside some creature you have not only enjoyed, but suffered with and carried burdens for. Something of this, she felt, Garth Vincent realized. And therefore was he alone. People criticised his manners. But after all—she smiled a little as the thought came to her—their manners seemed not too well to please him. He preferred his loneliness.

* * * * *

One morning when the patient took the clinical thermometer out of her mouth, instead of returning it at once to the nurse, she held it a moment, trying to read the registration. Nurse Phillips seized it, quite in Vincent's own style, and saying, 'The Doctor doesn't allow the patient to do that,' she walked off towards the washstand. She stood there as usual, pouring cold water over the thermometer, wiped it, and snapped it in its pencil-like case. 'When do you really wash it?' demanded Katharine.

'Wash it? I did so just now.'

'You poured a little cold water over it. When do you disinfect it?' The nurse stared. 'Surely,' Katharine went on, 'you realize that a thing that has been in the mouth needs——' She broke off—it was too absurd, telling this trained nurse a commonplace like that. 'I suppose you keep an antiseptic wash of some sort outside?'

'I don't know what you think I want an antiseptic for, in your case,' replied Nurse Phillips loftily.

'I have no idea what the custom is in English hospitals; but foreign nurses don't shut up their clinical thermometers in cases without disinfecting them.'

'Oh, don't they?'

'No, the thermometer lies in a bowl of carbolized water, and before it is taken out it is washed off with a bit of antiseptic cotton.'

'That's in bad cases, I suppose?'

The depth of her ignorance lay revealed. She had as little idea of the meaning of aseptic as any scullion.

'In England,' Nurse Phillips was saying with complacent finality, 'we pour clean water over them and wipe them.'

'In the nursing home, when you have two patients to look after, do you use the same thermometer for both?'

'Yes,' answered the woman brusquely.

'And you wash them so, only with cold water?'

'We don't take contagious diseases in the nursing home.'

Katharine began to watch her now, whatever she did, with a nervous dread of detecting her in further enormities.

One of the medicines was a sticky compound. After taking it that evening, Katharine watched as she had never done before the fate of the medicine glass. The washstand was nearly hidden by a great Spanish leather screen. The patient had to sit up and crane her neck to keep the blue-gowned figure within range of vision. To-night, for the first time, she did so. Saw how a little water was poured into the glass and then emptied out, saw the medicine still showing red and sticky. More water, and oh, horror! the nurse put two of her purple fingers into the glass and rubbed them round. Out with the ensanguined fluid, and in the act of wiping the glass, arrested by a voice from the bed.

'Surely you will at least rinse it first.'

The nurse never even turned round. 'I have.'

'Not since you had your fingers in the glass.'

'My fingers are clean.'

* * * * *

'Well, how's this patient to-day?'

'I am very miserable.'

'Of course you are—a miserable sinner.'

'The old pain came back in the night. I can't stand it.'

'Think you can't, eh?' He rubbed his hands cheerfully. It was a bitter day, but to Katharine his action had had an air of fiendish satisfaction.

'You must give me something,' she said with an accent of authority.

'I see. Because you haven't got any will-power I must further weaken you with drugs.'

'I have a great deal of will-power—but the after-effects of such pain as this are very bad.'

'They're nothing to the after-effects of narcotics.' She remembered a good illustration of the truth of that and fell silent.

'You must learn a little self-control—it's part of the cure.'

'But really I can't stand——'

'By God!' he said in the casual way in which he often invoked the Deity. 'It's curious what a lot more we can all of us stand than we think we can.'

She digested this, and seemed to abandon the first tack in favour of another.

'I dislike to make complaints more than you will believe, but . . . I think you must get me another nurse.'

'Why?'

'I'd like another.'

'You want to discharge a person without any reason?'

'I'd stand a better chance of getting well with another nurse, which is a pretty good reason.' Then, as he still wore that immobile black mask, and she was most unwilling to injure the woman in his eyes, 'Put it down to nerves. I'd like someone who will show more consideration for the patient and less for the——' ('doctor' was on her lip; she changed the word)—'treatment. She rubs it in night and day.'

'She isn't here at night.'

'Well, she rubs it in——'

'You need it rubbed in. That's what she is here for. Anything else?' He was probably quite shrewd enough to realize that this couldn't be all Katharine had to complain of.

'Well, she is not very fastidious.'

'It's not her business to be fastidious.'

'Well, then,' Katharine was goaded into saying, 'I'd like someone who hasn't been trained on dirty paupers.'

He walked quickly to the door, and jerked it open, calling sharply, 'Nurse.' Katharine quaked as the stiff figure came in.

'Yes, Dr. Vincent.'

'Why do you have all these flowers here?'

'I did suggest——'

'Take them out. Keep the windows open day and night. Good-bye!' . . . And that was all the good she had done herself.

* * * * *

The next time that Nurse Phillips came in with a basket of

roses Katharine started. Anton's roses! It was so; they always came on the same day of the week in a curious basket that looked as if it were carved in ivory. And was it Thursday again already? She realized she had hardly thought of Anton since the last roses came. Oh, the world was grown a strange and shrunken place—narrowed down to these four walls. It had been upon an impulse almost guilty that she had started at the reminder of Prince Anton.

'I have only brought them in for a moment for you to see,' the nurse was saying, with an air unusually conciliatory. 'I mustn't leave them after what Dr. Vincent said the last time.'

'No, you can have them if you like, but I don't want notes or cards left about.' She fumbled feverishly among the cool leaves.

'There was no note.'

'The card, then.'

The nurse had gone over to mend the fire, and made no rejoinder. It angered Katharine to think this woman should see even the name—that name!—should see it every week, be that much perforce in Katharine Dereham's confidence, and thinking, no doubt, all kinds of things that were not true. 'Was there no card with this?'

'Yes.'

'What was done with it?' The woman hesitated, caught the glint in the patient's eye, and answered:

'It is in the top drawer of the cabinet in the hall.'

'Who put it there?'

'I did.'

'What made you put it there?'

'That is where I put anything of that kind.'

'I left orders that everything coming for me was to be taken to Lord Peterborough.' No answer. 'What else belonging to me is out there in the hall cabinet?'

'Only a few cards and things.'

'Telegrams?' She writhed inwardly under the horror of Anton's possible outpourings passing through this nurse's hands, and left accessible to the curious eyes of servants. 'Letters? Are there letters left out there? Why don't you answer?'

'Dr. Vincent—. I am not supposed to answer.' The re-

joinder came sulkily, as the nurse laid down the tongs and stood up.

'Will you please go and get me those letters and things?'

'I can't do that.'

'I don't mean to read one of them. I simply want them here.'

'They are quite safe. But I'll lock the drawer, if you like.'

'You have not understood. What I am asking you is to bring the things to me.'

'I must not do that without permission.'

'Whose?'

'Dr. Vincent's.'

Katharine got up, and went swiftly, barefoot, across the floor, opened the door, crossed the hall, and pulled open the top drawer of an inlaid cabinet that stood between two windows. She gathered up a double handful of letters, cards, and orange-brown telegrams, glanced hurriedly far back into the deep drawer to satisfy herself that only visiting-cards remained, then turned with a feverish quickness, and flew along the hall towards her room. A man's voice down in the hall below arrested her. It sounded so exactly like Sir Lawrence McClintoch's croak. Was Lord Peterborough consulting him about her after all? Was that he now coming up? She hurried on. At the turn of the corridor she glanced down over the banister and saw Vincent half-way up the stairs. He was coming with slow step, and deeply meditative air, most unlike himself. Nor did he either pause, or hasten, on catching sight of the white apparition above. But even as it flew past she saw how his eyes, wide for once with surprise, had suddenly taken on that suffused, bloodshot look that anger gave them.

'What are you doing out here?' He overtook her at the door.

'I—I——'

'Get back into bed.' He spoke very roughly. She retreated before him breathless. The nurse melted into the hall.

'What were you doing out there?' He shut the door, and came across the room with that horrible red look in his eyes.

'I understood,' said Katharine, shaking with excitement, 'that my orders had been disobeyed—that my letters and things were not in the right hands.'

He brought out an oath that made Katharine catch her quick-coming breath. 'What have you got to do with letters while you're in my hands?'

'I don't want to read them,' she flung in.

'Your *letters!* damned nonsense! Not in the right hands!' He swore again. '*You're* not in the right hands! Send for somebody else! I've got no time to——' He turned like one bent blindly on rushing away—had an air of thinking the door was where the open fire burned so bright—brought up suddenly there before it, and stood glaring, his back turned squarely on his patient.

In a flash Katharine was out of bed, slid her feet into slippers, went over to where he stood, thrust two thin white hands between him and the blaze, and let a shower of notes, cards, telegrams, fall down upon the coals.

'They are *all* there,' she said, without looking up, and seemed to wait an instant, like a penitent child, in her long white gown. Then, as Vincent made no sign nor motion, she turned away. When he did look round she was in bed again.

He walked to the door without a word, without even raising his eyes. Katharine said to herself: 'He's going! He's leaving me!—what shall I do—what shall I do?'

'Nurse,' he called sharply, as he shut the door. He stood, a second or two, in the hall giving his directions, and then—Yes, he was running downstairs. Would he ever come back? Oh yes, or else he would have said. What a hurry he was always in to get away! Was there any sick-room where he lingered? Ah no. If Garth Vincent stayed long anywhere, it must be in some happy house where Health abode.

Nurse Phillips went out of the room as usual upon Miss Gillies' appearance the next morning, and when Katharine opened her eyes, after trying to sleep, for the hour of darkened chamber that always followed massage—she found a strange young woman pulling up the shades.

'Good-morning. I am to be your nurse,' she said, smiling over her shoulder.

'Oh! Where is Nurse Phillips?'

'She has gone.'

Something in the fresh, alert face that was as professional as

Nurse Phillips' own, and yet far from unpleasing, made Katharine feel it well to abstain from questions. But she recognised Vincent's hand.

It had not taken long, when he had once made up his mind.

* * * *

The next day, a quarter of an hour or so before he was due:

'Put that chair closer, please,' said the patient to the new nurse—'then perhaps he will sit in it.'

'Oh, he always sits on their beds.'

Their beds? Let him. But on my bed——!

'He does not "always" do so here,' the patient said aloud, 'and I do not despair of seeing that he has learned better manners.'

The nurse laughed softly.

'I suppose,' pursued Katharine, 'you have heard his patients say that before.'

'Oh yes, they all complain of his manners—at first. But he's too busy, I suppose, to——'

'Other doctors,' Katharine began, with a vision of the charming grace of her Italian medico, the irreproachable manners of her Paris doctor—the soothing gentleness of Sir Lawrence McClintoch—and with less enthusiasm she thought of the cat-like step and honeyed solicitude of Dr. Traine. It was a universally accepted axiom that doctors should be reassuring, sympathetic—not come in like a breath of east wind, glower at you as if you were a naughty child, and—she recalled other 'ways' of Vincent's that made her flush—she hoped with anger. 'Other doctors aren't too busy to behave. Quite as great men as Garth Vincent——'

'But you don't go to them,' said the nurse, alert.

'I have.'

'Ah! you've tried them!' The inference was unanswerable. 'Sister Morton—she's at the Nursing Home, you know—she says he has a great horror of "the good bedside manner."'

'That's quite unnecessary,' said Miss Dereham with emphasis.

* * * *

Two minutes later, while Nurse Lynn was gone downstairs to telephone to the chemist, Natalie slipped noiselessly into her mistress's room, finger on lip, laid a letter on the bed, and stole away without a word. Katharine recognised Anton's writing,

and before she had time to think, she had torn the envelope open and read: '*Margaretha is dead—yet how shall I weep at what breaks down the barrier between you and me? For God's sake send me a sign.*—ANTON.'

But she saw clear at last. It meant no more than that he hoped she finally would yield. And if it did mean more . . . It was not merely Anton's wife—it was Anton himself who was dead. Even as she folded up the letter she saw not the German soldier in her mind's eye, but a very different apparition. The whole room—all of life, was dominated by a forbidding and all ungracious figure, which yet to her brought an influence of confidence and safety.

Natalie had been leaning over the banisters listening to the new nurse's strenuous endeavour to put herself in communication with the chemist. Natalie knew the facilities offered by the London telephone system, and felt safe. She put her head in at Katharine's door with an engaging smile. But the most indulgent of mistresses regarded her with a look most strangely stern. 'Don't you know that Dr. Vincent doesn't wish me to receive letters?'

'Oui, mademoiselle,' said the maid, 'mais cette lettre là——'

'Is just the same as any other letter. And all are forbidden. There is no answer.' Natalie withdrew abashed, but instantly her head reappeared. 'Vous n'en direz rien a M. le Docteur?'

Under the coverlid Katharine smiled. What had been going on downstairs, that Natalie, who feared nor God nor devil, should be so anxious Vincent should not learn of her errand to Miss Dereham's door?

'I'd be very sorry,' said that lady, 'to have him hear that his orders had been set at defiance.'

'Oui, mademoiselle,' said the Frenchwoman with unnatural meekness, and discreetly withdrew.

Still, so mechanically may an old infatuation work, that in one side of her brain Katharine could lend herself to the idea that she was thrilled at the news of the death of her rival, that she waited with excitement to hear 'what next,' even imagined Anton coming over incognito to see her. She stirred uneasily at the supposition. He might think he could win over Lord

Peterborough—might insist on seeing her—might even encounter Vincent on his way upstairs.

But at the invocation of that name her imagination was lulled again. Prince Anton could 'get round' servants, might even get round Lord Peterborough, but a hundred Antons would not move Garth Vincent. She settled down into the pillows with a luxurious sense of safety. She fell to shaping dialogues between the two men, and could not for her life keep Anton from cutting therein a sorry figure. As for herself, she took no concern. She was under Vincent's care. Warm and close, like a generous cloak, she wrapped the words 'under Garth Vincent's care' about her shrinking heart. He might browbeat her himself. He would not let another.

She lay and waited for him.

CHAPTER VII

ON Friday of the fourth week he did not come at all. Katharine had waited for him with an impatience she had some ado to mask. When the new nurse brought up a telephone message that he was delayed, and would not be in till the morrow, Katharine felt the pinch of a disappointment wholly disproportionate to the cause. It was as if he had done her some great wrong—failed her at a crucial moment. She was angry and sore, and, yes, in pain. She had not noticed it before, but the pain was greater than it had been—far, far greater. For fear the nurse should guess at her frame of mind, she dwelt on the physical suffering.

‘Would you like me to telephone and ask him to come in after dinner?’

‘Oh, no.’

Nurse Lynn readily accepted the patient’s implied promise of endurance. ‘If you *can* wait till to-morrow—it’s rather hard on him after being so driven all day, to be called out at night.’

‘I shouldn’t think of it,’ said Katharine decidedly.

‘He’ll be ill if he goes on like this,’ said the nurse. ‘He has been told that if he works more than five days a week he will break down. And he does not always get his Saturday and Sunday in the country. He certainly looked very fagged on Wednesday.’

‘Did he?’

‘Didn’t you notice? He is very anxious—or he wouldn’t be promising to see people Saturday.’

‘Anxious?’ (Am I seriously worse? she thought.)

‘—about somebody at the Nursing Home. And it tells on him.’

‘Who is it?’ demanded Katharine.

'We aren't supposed to say. But we always notice he is like that if a case isn't doing well—hasn't a kind word for anybody. I never saw him worse than he was when Mrs. ——well, the wife of his greatest friend, was very ill. I nursed her. It was all we could do'—(Katharine saw how the nurse associated herself neck to neck with the doctor in the struggle)—'all we could do, to pull her through. And she suffered the most awful agony. One day he came in when I was off duty, and found some cocaine on her table. He just stood there in the middle of the room, and swore till . . . well, my patient told me she was so wrought up by the things he said, and the way he looked, that when she found breath to say why she must have an anodyne—the pain was gone. For the half-hour that he stayed there, she had no twinge of it.'

'I doubt if bad language would act so beneficently upon all,' said Katharine dryly.

'Well, it's very curious,' observed the nurse. 'I don't say it's his bad language, but he *does* take away pain just by coming in.' Katharine had already had her own private siege, refusing to admit this superstition, and would not yet capitulate—certainly not before a witness.

'He had to go to Osborne that week,' the nurse went on, 'for a consultation, and he left that cocaine on my patient's table, only telling her that if she took it she would make the battle harder. When he got back, and saw how pale and spent she was, without sleep, and enduring that awful pain, he said'—she lifted her head with an air of one trying on, in imagination, a wreath of laurel; Katharine prepared to hear some utterance heroic, if not profound—'my patient told me that he said, "You're a plucky woman!" and she *felt it was worth it.*'

'Worth . . . what?'

'To hear him say that.'

That Vincent should call one a plucky woman, worth days of agony!

The next day at noon came a second message to say that, just as he was leaving home to come to Miss Dereham, he was unexpectedly sent for on a very urgent case, and would not therefore be at Peterborough House till Monday.

Even after Katharine's ire had somewhat subsided, her sense

of injury remained acute. Who were these people that took up all his time—kept him from her—couldn't do without him?

Visions visited her of houses, here and there, all over the West End. Men and women lying in their beds, with ears keen to catch the sound of his horse's hoofs, eyes turned to the door: when will he come? When will Help come over the threshold in the person of Garth Vincent? Hope—Happiness . . . what a shining train he brought with him into shadowed rooms. Gods! what a power for one man to hold in a democratic age!

But her own private disappointment that he had not brought her any good gift that day, of Faith or of Forgetting—that pressed hard. She could not get away from the pain in her body, and shrank appalled at thought of all the hours she must live through before Monday should bring her help. And she was humiliated that it should be so. Why could she not bear her pain alone? Why should she, Katharine Dereham, want to lean upon him? It was inevitable enough in the feeble, shallow, hysterical women, all very well for a romantic little nurse, that the doctor should represent to *her* all good things, success or failure, public opinion, the great world. But for Katharine Dereham! She wondered an instant what Anton would say could he look into her mind and see there nothing—but *nothing*, save a longing to see this rough man who so neglected her. Anton, Bertie, Blanche, Lord Peterborough—they flitted faint and shadow-like about the intense silhouette of Garth Vincent, always now planted firm in the foreground. She forced herself to think of other things—scenes in gay drawing-rooms, in Roman galleries, palaces, the Schleggen Cour at Berlin, Court balls in London, and the brilliant days and nights she had lived through in this very house, where she now lay wan and spent, listening in vain for the sound of Garth Vincent's horses clattering in the court. Might he not, after all, get away from that other 'case' in time to come to her? She tossed and turned and waited. Angry and sore at her own weakness, she summoned Sorrow's aid. Forced herself to think of those very things from which a month ago she had prayed deliverance. Again called up Anton—and even while she said 'Anton' behold it was another. Made herself think of her father. But even that spell, so long potent for misery and preoccupation—even

that had lost its hold. Vincent's face rose up between her and the sorry vision, and shut its image out.

Not merely a distraction now—a burning necessity to prompt the people about her to talk of him.

More stories of the cures he had wrought, on the hopeless and the dying, and always, where possible, the personal application to give the patient courage. When Katharine was most harassed by pain, the panacea offered was some form of, 'We must tell him.' Once the response came sharp, 'What's the good of that?' The new nurse stared. 'He will know what to do for it.' Then, as the patient said nothing, 'You must have faith in him,' she said softly, with such an accent that Katharine felt the 'him' to carry the capital letter. Just so she knew pious exhorters spoke of the Saviour of men. They weren't content, these women, with vaunting his natural powers, he must have a touch of the supernatural forsooth—to gratify the ingrained human love of magic.

'You think he didn't know, without your telling him, that your head was bad on Wednesday? Why, he came in here quite well and cheerful, and went out of your room in three minutes with a raging headache.'

'Yes,' said the patient in a commonplace tone, 'he said the room was kept too hot. Did he tell you he had a headache?'

'Oh, no—he never talks to *me*—except, of course, a word or two when it's necessary about my work. He scolded me Wednesday.' She beamed.

'What did he say?'

'He said, looking frightfully angry, how did I expect to get anybody well in such an atmosphere.'

'Did you tell him it was my fault—that I had insisted——'

'Oh, no,' she smiled. 'With him it's always the "nurse's fault."' On the other side of the door, Katharine remembered, it was always the patient's. 'But I could see by his eyes, before he spoke, that he had all of a sudden got a headache. And he reported me to Sister Morton. She telephoned to me, and I went to see her in the evening. She mentioned then, that he was frightfully overworked, and had one of his bad afternoons. It's no wonder,' she added, with a little head-shake, 'that he has success. He pays for it.'

‘How does he pay?’

‘With his own strength. He gives *Himself* to his sick people.’ (Again that effect of the capital letter. Gives Himself! Katharine forced herself to smile.) ‘Sister Morton says he goes sleepless, night after night, sometimes when he is anxious about a case. And all day long he is giving out his vital forces. She says it’s no wonder he is sometimes spent and ill with fighting for his sick people. And because he doesn’t make polite speeches, they call him hard. But it’s only the people outside’—the motion of Nurse Lynn’s white cap indicated that fraction of the world who were not nurses—‘who think he’s unsympathetic. We know better. Dr. Vincent loves his patients.’ But here Katharine laughed outright. ‘Yes,’ protested the nurse, ‘he can be horribly rude to them, but he cares about them—just as we do. You can’t work for weeks to help someone and be indifferent. It isn’t in nature. That is, if you love your work.’

‘And do you mean to say you *really* care about all the horrid sick people you have to do disagreeable things for?’

‘Yes,’ said the woman, her fresh face shining—‘some more than others, of course, but I always care.’

‘Then, you have the true vocation,’ said Katharine, with a sense of respect.

‘It certainly makes me miserable when they don’t get well,’ Nurse Lynn added, ‘just as it does Him.’

‘I don’t say it is so with you, but in Dr. Vincent’s case, what you call sympathy, I call ambition. He hates not to succeed.’

‘So do the other doctors. But more than half his patients are people who’ve tried everything else—wrecks. And they come to him against the other doctors’ advice, having heard all kinds of things against him.’

‘He must know,’ added Katharine, ‘that all his rivals and his enemies are waiting, keen as razors, to drop upon him if he fails. Yes, I’ve heard about it. The older men see this young iconoclast climbing up, setting at defiance old ways and old gods, rough, indifferent, without reverence or fear, calmly incurring their displeasure and sweeping away their practice—royalty going to him and getting treated like any pauper in the free hospital——’ Katharine stopped, breathless. Where was she going? Had she, then, fallen into step with these foolish women who followed him

like sheep? Heavens! *Heavens!* Where—was she? Whither drifting? Was he conscious at all of what was happening? He shut one up here, with nothing to do but lie and watch the legend grow! Daily an inch is added to his stature! Soon he will be twelve feet high, and it will be fair weather only when he smiles, and storm and darkness when he draws his black brows together.

And still she kept up the show of cynicism and of unbelief.

‘Why do I take this odious stuff?’ she said, pausing on Sunday morning with the medicine glass in her hand.

‘Because you know it will do you good,’ responded Nurse Lynn with a cheerful promptitude.

‘Oh, you can’t expect me to feel the blind, besotted faith in Vincent that *you* do.’ The nurse flushed crimson—and Katharine was sorry for the error of her tongue. Sorry, not alone that she had hurt the nice little woman, but afraid she had set a bar to conversation and to confidence. She hastened to repair the error. ‘I confess,’ she said, ‘that it does weigh with me a great deal that he is able to inspire such zeal in the people who work for him.’

‘Yes,’ said Nurse Lynn, still painfully flushed, but speaking steadily and gravely. ‘He has a great many enemies, and . . . they say . . . an unhappy nature, but if it’s any comfort, he can always see that the people who work for him believe in him.’

‘He is fortunate. I can’t think of anything much better in the way of a destiny than to do good work among people who believe in it, and—like you.’ She spared the good little creature ‘love you,’ but only because it was a true description of the relation Vincent’s associates bore him; only because Katharine felt the situation too vividly to use that word—word like a torch ready to fire the city where men and women dwell in pretended safety, going decorously about their duties through ruined streets and over tottering bridges. What a new world this was—this Underworld, as she had begun by calling it (though slowly it had climbed the horizon like a star)—this world of hard work—work, whose end was good to others, world governed so despotically by men whom Lady Algernon and her like thought they condescended to if they asked to dine, and then, in trouble, leaving condescension at home, fled to these

despots with white faces, listened to them as had they been oracles, obeyed them as had they been gods!

She looked back, reviewing the strange slow weeks. As the days had drifted by, the world that Katharine Dereham had lived in all her life had grown dwarfed and shadowed. Not merely aimless, not only morally ugly, but mean, indistinct. What a very little game it was they'd all been playing! What easy victories, what cheap victims! It seemed to her that she, who all her life had lived amongst the 'governing class' had never (with the exception of a certain great English soldier)—never seen a man who was master, till she saw Garth Vincent in his consulting-room. However little willing, no one disobeyed him there. Lying and pretence were left on the far side of his threshold—the secrets of the deepest hearts were bared in *that* confessional, where Science was acknowledged Deity, and Vincent her high-priest enforcing truth, the 'creed.

And not there alone. As she realized how he had made this long, impregnable old Peterborough House his own, dominating, permeating it from garret to cellar, she smiled, remembering the Scotch saying, 'Where McGregor sits is the head of the table.' Where Vincent came, the place became his and the people there his servants. And it was not, as she had thought at first (with a comic side-glance at herself), an effect of partial paralysis, induced by sheer astonishment at the rough directness of his address—that rude succour that had the air of assault. No, this mastery was a real thing with its roots in character. It was most complete over those who knew him best. Clear enough now, that he moved among the people who served under him, as a General moves at the head of a disciplined army—the kind of General who, without seeming to try, mysteriously makes his soldiers glad to follow him, even on short rations and bleeding feet.

History inquired in vain what spell such leaders had invoked, but it shaped the story of the nations just as it shaped single lives. It was notorious that nurses fell in love with the doctors they worked for, and that it was held to be a nuisance, matter for covert smiling. But here the pitiful commonness of the event was transmuted, lifted up, by something in the man—so ready to stamp on weakness the moment it showed its head,

something in him so contemptuous of feeling that did not translate itself to Service, that the little tragedy of these women's lives, took on a touching dignity, as stoically they worked beside him.

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Katharine realized now, looking back, how her imagination had been haunted by the memory of the little talk, during which he had said in that unsentimental, defiant fashion, that only love made happiness. A thousand times she had recalled his lowering face, his downbent sullen look, and the tone in which he had, for the one and only time, said the word 'love' in her hearing.

The wonder at his daring to speak the word at all—given the man he was—to say it in a sick-room, to say it in hers—wonder at it pursued her more and more as the days went on, and as the meaning of all he said and did gathered significance. She remembered how on that occasion, when the first surprise was over, and she had glanced furtively at him, how she saw, or thought she saw, that he was not thinking of her the least in the world. Even as long ago as that, had she been sorry? Had she unconsciously hoped for some sign that the great good he had missed was spelt with the letters of *her* name? Certainly there had been no sign in him of any remembrance of the things he had said to her in the drawing-room downstairs all those years ago. No sign of aught but a hurt, defiant creature confessing to another, his failure to find the best. Had he admitted so much to Katharine Dereham as to one notoriously vowed to an absorbing passion? Had *that* been the key to the license? The mere surmise was edged with anger—yes, and quick with instant rebellion. But she was too honest-hearted to be able to soothe herself with any construction of his words or conduct, that could fairly be interpreted as meaning the smallest interest in her. He had conveyed to her unmistakably, from the first, that she was no more to him now than any other sick woman. And she had been so relieved and glad. Where was it gone—that relief and that gladness? What was this in its place?

Katharine was far enough from being the kind of woman, who wants every man she comes into contact with, to fall in

love with her. Her life had been too full of that kind of thing—and her vision of its ultimate value was too clear and sane. Why, then, did she feel with growing poignancy the hurt of this one man's indifference? Could it be because to her he had come to be—— No—no.

It was long and long enough, since lying here in her bed, after he had left her with a jibe, that she had said to herself, 'If he cared for me now, could I marry him?' And albeit her blood made instant affirmation, her judgment said firmly, 'No.' He comes out of another world. He couldn't live in mine, nor I in his. He is this. He is that. She buttressed her sense of criticism night and day. For let no one think Katharine Dereham did not struggle against the spell that circumstance (as she truly said), more than the man, had cast about her. I am weak and full of fancies, she told herself a thousand times, perhaps at the mercy of *any* impression, and this one not alone strong in itself, but making, in spite of all, especial appeal to me—to me above any woman living.

That he should obsess her, like this, was partly a result of her recoil from the rottenness of her old standard. Not the outward form and pressure of Romance alone, she had long believed Prince Anton to embody. Behind her girlish infatuation, had been the unconscious reaching out for high and noble things.

Might not this stronger feeling (oh yes, she was sounding depths through all these days and nights that Anton had left her stranger to)—might not this, instead of matter for shame-faced concealing, might it not be a thing wholly honourable—fortunate? A maturer ideal, in which the man's roughness stood for truth, *was* truth—his absence of outer graces a kind of blessed relief from pretence and inanity and humiliating insecurity. There—there, she felt, she touched the heart of the matter. This man could treat her cavalierly—he would never shame her as lying shames. Oh the peace of truth! She leaned against it as the weary rest upon a pillow—but started up with burning face—'truth' had taken on human form! The imagined pillow under her hot cheek was Garth Vincent's breast.

CHAPTER VIII

THE one thing at this juncture that Vincent could have done, had he realized and cared to cure this new malady, would have been to put off his armour of professionalism and give her the smallest one of the assurances her heart cried out for day and night. But there seemed no flaw in the armour. So she fed herself on dreams, faring more daintily than any woman may who finds herself called on to digest hard fact. In that world to which she retired with his image, she was able to wrest all to beauty and to honour. She could, of course, have set his faults aside. She preferred to wreathe them with a fine romance.

And so she gave him liberally out of her own armoury, anything he hitherto had lacked to overcome her. And so she lay there, on a pillow full of dreams, drawing out now a little song, and now a picture of him. Now was he called on to save the life of his enemy, and she saw him going straight to the task—fulfilling it with a plain simplicity that wore an air of antique virtue. And the notion pleased her like the long-sought music of a perfect rhyme. Others might call him coarse. He was merely primitive. Had she not said when first speaking of him to Lord Peterborough that, though he had buffeted her, he had been kind 'in the same way that the wind and the rain are kind'?

Yes, he was like that—like the wind and the rain. But he must have tenderness too. And to verify it, through his roughness, she must make pictures of him with poor, shy patients and, more eloquent still, with his little crippled brother. And these pictures, songs, and dreams carried her farther and farther into the life that men had said was lonely. Had he known it, Garth Vincent was never an hour of those days without companionship.

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'I'm worse.'

He went through the usual routine rather more cheerfully than usual, Katharine, for once, telling him how the pain had increased. 'Oh, I'm very much worse.'

'No, you're not.'

'But indeed I am.'

'You only think so. As a matter of fact, you're better.' And the words imposed themselves upon her like a law. She felt the thing he had declared—felt it so long as the Black-Magic Man was there.

But what was to become of her if she were better only upon those terms? Soon she would have been lying here six weeks. What was to come after? And all her dreams would shrivel up and vanish, in a sudden loneliness and fear.

Nevertheless, with her final envisagement of the fact that he had swept into her life, like a flood through a broken dyke, abolished all older landmarks, and overwhelmed her world—with her acceptance of this fact as inexorable, fore-ordained, the instinct to keep aloof from him, to shrink from under his hands, grew hour by hour. It was, of course, mere reflex action—the pull-back from Nature's imperious prompting 'on!' But the instinct, strong as self-preservation (of one phase of which it was a spiritual counterpart), was so dominant with her that for days she could scarce be civil to him. She had always (as she looked back, this was clear) *felt* him keenly. His first entrance into her room, had given her a sense of being intensely alive.

Now, partly that instinct of self-preservation, and underneath, lurking behind, a refinement of sensuousness, made her want to elude the touch of those slim brown fingers that did work as mechanic, as unfaltering, as some fine instrument that ruthlessly registers human conditions, feeling them as little as the thermometer feels cold.

A thousand times she had reminded herself of how she had always despised the weak, hysterical fools who fell in love with their doctors. There was something to her sense quite especially undignified in it. No such sentiment ought even remotely to touch a relation which at best is delicate and trying. Of course, doctors couldn't like sick women. Naturally, far more

than other men they worshipped health. And if they saw that their patients—— Ugh! how it must revolt them!

This man, especially! How merciless he would be! For days now her preoccupation was how successfully to hide the truth. The strain told obviously upon her weakened forces. She was spent, and daily still more frail. She, who had been used to sleep so well, began to lie awake hour after hour, alternately driving the thought of him away with scourging words, and then calling him back, with thoughts and images that lulled her like a poison, working to later pain. She would sometimes in the night make a desperate pact with herself that when he came again she would say, with the boldness of one fighting for life, 'Go away, and let me send for someone else. You can't do me any good, for I've fallen in love with you.' And in the morning she would see that it would be easier to die than to say such words. Following upon this, came the phase in which intense, and hitherto unimagined physical agony, drove out thought. An evening when she got up and walked the floor, saying to Nurse Lynn:

'Send for Vincent.'

He came.

'I am in unbearable pain, and I've stood it as long as I can. I must sleep. Give me a draught.'

'No!'

Katharine had gone back to bed before he entered. The fair hair that had tumbled down on each side of her face set all save eyes in shadow.

'Where is the pain?' He bent down over her with a strange gentleness, and for a moment she could not speak. 'I can't see you.' He lifted the electric night-light with one hand, and with the other he pushed the hair away from her face.

'*Don't!*' she cried, recoiling. Plainly, as the light flashed an instant on him, she saw how his long, gleaming eyes grew suddenly suffused. They had a curious trick of getting bloodshot when he was angry. She had noticed it before. But she had never seen him, nor any human soul, look as he looked at that moment, when he set the light down on the marble slab, with a clang and an oath, left her bedside and fled to the fire.

'If you'll forgive me,' said Katharine, trembling, 'I'll forgive you.'

'Forgive. . . . What have you got to forgive? I'm here for business, and I attend to it to the best of my ability. But I'd much prefer you should send for——'

'Hush, hush,' she said, very low. 'You ought to know it was the pain.'

He walked up and down before the fire, fulminating. She didn't listen.

'You don't mean that you can't give me something to deaden this suffering.'

'By God! I can—but I won't. Send for a regular practitioner. Who do you want? What's his name? Come, who is it?'

Down under all her wretchedness, she smiled. He was sensitive as any woman. Hurt to the quick that a patient of his should recoil from his hand, when he was trying only to help her, outraged at his suspicion that she should think he overstepped his duty; ready with all his success to think she was losing faith in him; quick to forestall a possible wish to 'call in another opinion.'

'Come, who is it you want?' he was still angrily demanding.

'There is no one,' she said, quite low. But he was not appeased.

'Call in some other man! Any general practitioner can give you some pleasant dose that'll put you to sleep. I could do it too. I can take away any damned pain you like. The difference between us is, that I won't make you easy for a night at the cost of all the rest of your life.'

'Very well,' said Katharine. Still he was angrily pacing the floor, and recommending general practitioners.

When he had exhausted the theme, and found that still Katharine lay quite quiet and apparently subdued, he said more gently: 'If I were weak enough to give you a narcotic now, in the state your nerves are in, I'd be doing you a serious injury.'

'But how am I going to get through these hours ahead of me?' As he seemed, unheeding, to be going, 'Oh!' she cried, 'Black-Magic Man, give me a charm!'

He stopped, looked back, stared at her an instant.

'Set your teeth, and say damn!' With which flower of style, and fragment of high philosophy, he left the room.

The next day he returned.

'Any better?'

'No.'

'What are you worrying about?'

'Nothing.'

'Yes, you are, There's nothing in your analysis to account for the state you're in. What are you worrying about?'

'Only at being so ill.'

'You are beginning to fret at confinement.'

'No . . .'

'You think someone is bothering about you'—(did she dream it, or did his heavy eyes look dully out for an instant at the figure in Prussian blue above the blazing fire?)—'you think someone can't get on without you. Women are so damned conceited!'

'I'm *not* thinking——' Katharine could never remember quite what the words were that tumbled out—she only felt through the nightmare of pain, and anger, and love, and fear, a passionate need of denying, of sweeping utterly and for ever away, his belief that Anton, Prince of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein, counted for anything with her in the future. It was suddenly, somehow, a matter of honour to disavow concern with all that life where he—Garth Vincent—was not.

She could have wept, as she saw her failure to convince him, written in his face, before he said the words: 'I assure you the world goes on very well without . . . any of us. But you won't believe me. You lie awake, and . . .'

'And what?'

'Well, *you* know.'

'I—I don't know,' she faltered. But she saw now, plainly, that the roving glance that would not rest on her, had caught upon the picture of the Prince. It was more than she could bear. She half sat up. 'Perhaps you share the vulgar suspicion that I have a very special interest at stake'—(only a gleam answered out of half-shut eyes)—'that I am Prince Anton's mistress.' As he said nothing, nor even moved, she found herself adding passionately: 'I am not. I have *never* been.'

'Much better for you if you had, since you hadn't the sense

to marry,' and before she could recover from her stark astonishment, he was gone.

The next day he was there again—no interval now, daily visits, but shorter even than they had been, and never talk of anything touching himself.

'You're so accustomed to complaining, exaggerating people,' she said, 'that you have no idea what I'm suffering.'

'Yes, I have. I know it's Hell,' he answered calmly.

His acceptance for her of the worst that pain could be, made strangely for her acceptance of it. 'We'll see how it is to-morrow.'

And to-morrow: 'Well?'

'The same.'

'Where?' She showed him, feeling behind the clamour of the tortured nerves a curious new peace instead of the old fierce unrest at his nearness. Pain had to that extent sobered the fever in her blood. She felt no longer woman, but mere suffering human being.

* * * * *

Saturday to-day. How long, how torturingly long, before Monday would bring him back! But Sunday brought a change in the weather. Katharine was quick to feel the revivifying influence of that rare phenomenon, a little sunshine in the London winter. 'He'll be glad I'm better,' she thought childishly, and he had barely got inside her door, before she greeted him joyfully with the news, 'Oh, Black-Magic Man, the pain's all gone.'

If he were pleased, he successfully concealed the fact.

'Better, are you?' he said roughly. 'It's about time! Ever since I took hold of you, you've been behaving like a damned baulky horse!'

She gasped. He never even looked up from under his sullen eyelids to see how she took his elegant speech. The contrast between the ideal hero and the queer creature before her struck her both as comic and exhilarating. 'Why do you come back after a pleasant holiday in the country with evil words in your mouth?'

'I hadn't a pleasant holiday.'

'Why not?'

'Had the blues.'

'What nonsense!' said Katharine, feeling singularly cheerful herself, in spite of the 'evil words.'

'It isn't nonsense. There are always more unhappy days to be got through than happy ones.'

'Not if one has health.' She sighed enviously.

'In that case I must be ill.'

Does he make a cult of sadness? thought Katharine. Does he shrewdly guess that it makes one's heart ache to know how hard he works to lift up other lives, and yet must himself live more than half his days under the harrow of depression?

'Do you really mean you were too 'down' to enjoy the country this glorious weather?'

He nodded. 'I didn't even care about my dogs.'

Her betterment was as short-lived as the London sunshine. The next time he came, 'Oh, help me—help me!'

'Don't I try?'

'Yes, but I'm such a difficult subject!'

'You're right there.'

Four unforgettable days, during which he did not see her. He had gone to Scotland for a consultation. Then came the break of Sunday.

On Monday he found her very ill—said little, left a new prescription. She, too, had hardly spoken. But something seized hold of her as he was going out. She turned her white face towards him: 'Don't let it be so long until you come again.'

'Why?'

'You help me.'

'Why, I thought it was the other way about. I thought I did you harm.'

'Oh, no.' And when he was gone she smiled a little to herself, supposing he had in mind his roughness, and the instances—not a few—where he had got on other patients' nerves, and where they had even, according to the nurse, written letters asking him not to come again, for a few days.

How modest he is, after all, quite ready to think ill of himself! . . . Then a flash, as of horrible lightning, and Katharine covered her face from its fierceness with her hands.

He *guesses*! He has no fear, this time, that his faults of temper

or of manner have done his patient harm. I've borne them strangely well—so strangely, that at last . . . he *knows*!

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'There is a great deal of noise about the house. Why are so many carriages driving into the court?'

The nurse looked embarrassed. 'I will ask,' she said. But if she asked, she did not share her information.

'I shall have lain here six weeks next Tuesday,' Katharine said gravely to Vincent upon the occasion of his subsequent visit. 'When am I to get up?'

'As soon as you are better.' Each time that he came after that, she said something about bringing the treatment to a close. But he was firm.

'You said six weeks.'

'I hoped six weeks would do it.'

The intense pain was certainly yielding again.

* * * * *

'When can I get up?'

'To-morrow.'

Katharine's face broke into smiling. '*Really?* When can I have my letters?'

'Wednesday, if you're as well as this.'

'And when may I go out?'

'At the end of the week, if you don't backslide.'

She lay thinking. How she had plagued him these last days, to say just that! And now, unexpectedly, upon the coming of the longed-for word, a great jump of joy, but with something like a caught foot to one vaulting. What is this? Why am I not wholly glad to be better—to be taking my place again among the living and the doing? Then she saw that all these weeks of imprisonment had made a change in her other than that coming through Vincent's personality. When her first excitement at the thought of getting up and going out—when that died, she found herself trying to evade an obscure sense of fear, creeping, creeping, till finally it flew at her throat and held her panther-like. Fear of what? Of life. Of going out from the sheltered place where she had lain and fretted, found fault with nurse and doctor and masseuse, suffered a strange new malady, and railed mightily at the old, and sighed ten thousand times for health and freedom.

Only to get out of this dungeon-room where Vincent had laid galling chains upon her!—oh, to stand upon her feet, and meet him as a free woman, accustomed to dictate terms to men! And now that the doors are wide, only a shrinking back from the light, from the roar of the outside world, from this much-vaunted freedom—that no woman, she told herself passionately, no woman has any use for.

On the other side of the door waited Anton, free—waited her father—Bertie. And she was not yet a well woman. Oh, far enough from that. How was she to take up the heavy burden? Suddenly to shoulder all responsibility herself, after this long physical and mental idleness, after this close-wrapping of hourly attention, of never-sleeping care . . . to go out to face the November wind? She shivered like a new-born babe, and fell to wailing inwardly. And the mood was not as passing as she hoped. All the various motives avowed and unavowed, for shrinking back, for veiled terror, kept flying across her vision like dim sea-birds in the dusk before a storm. They gather in a place of shelter, they perch behind a tall, wind-breasting rock. Not one little fear but flies to *him* and falls to rest. She could reason about it. For all these weeks, not an act of my life but has been referred to him. May I? Is this well? I am weaker! 'No, you're not weaker!'—and straightway weakness was not. Was the pain too great? Patience, he will come. Was the time unendurably long? But he is on the stair. Am I utterly out of heart? He has confidence to share—nay, compels your sharing it. He is the great symbol of duty and of strength.

The early sayings of the nurse came back: 'You must have faith in Him.' And she had. And to this end: that without him, faith was not on the earth.

'What are you going to do when you get up?'

She looked at him an instant. 'To do?'

'Yes: where do you want to go?'

'Oh, I shan't go anywhere. Lord Peterborough hates travelling nowadays.'

'You've got to get into the country, or by the sea.'

'Oh no,' she found herself pleading, as though, after she left his hands, she was still bound to acknowledge his supremacy over her actions. 'I don't feel enterprising.'

'Of course not. But you must leave London. Better arrange to do so Saturday.'

'Is a change of air absolutely essential?'

'Absolutely. Where will you go?'

'Oh, I shall have to consult Lord Peterborough. Poor dear! he'll have to immolate himself, and come too!' He never failed her, bless him! But Vincent had precipitately left the room. She heard a low-voiced conversation going on outside. He was talking longer with the nurse to-day than he ever had before. What——? At last the quick steps running down the stair. Nurse Lynn came in and sat down.

'Miss Dereham, Dr. Vincent says that I must tell you to prepare yourself for some sad news.' Katharine sat up suddenly.

'My father——'

'No. Lord Peterborough——'

'Well? Is—is he—— He is dying!' She was out of bed. Nurse Lynn ran forward, and prevented her from reaching the door.

'Oh, Miss Dereham, come back. It is of no use. He—— Lord Peterborough is dead.' Katharine stopped stone-still in the centre of the room.

'When did he die?'

'Two weeks ago, when you were worse. You remember that day you asked why so many carriages were driving into the court. It was the day of the funeral.'

BOOK III

VINCENT

CHAPTER I

TENDERLY attached as she had been to Lord Peterborough, through all the years since his roof had meant home to her, the first thought upon the shock of the news had been, not her own loss and utter loneliness, but: 'Did he want me? Of course he did. He was missing me all those last weeks of his kind life.' Few people, so far as she knew his history, had ever been necessary to Lord Peterborough, but Katharine Dereham was one. She ought to have been with him. Oh, to die alone, like that, with only hirelings near!—not to have your last look into the dimming world, encounter eyes that love you.—Her tears flowed fast. 'Why,' she said to Nurse Lynn, 'was I not told, when they saw he was seriously ill?'

'Sir Lawrence wanted you to be told.'

'Well?'

'Dr. Vincent had an interview with Lord Peterborough, and after it was over Lord Peterborough gave orders, himself, that you should on no account be told.'

Vincent! Vincent had done that. The next day she turned a sad, reproachful countenance upon him as he entered, asking how he could do her such a wrong. Had he no idea how much love and duty she owed the lonely old man? She would have been quite able to bear seeing him.

'I was the best judge of that—at least, I was the only judge.'

'It was very wrong of you——'

'It was absolutely right. I would do just the same again.'

'I can only say your judgment was greatly at fault. The shock of hearing "It is all over," and I—I not there beside him'—the tears overflowed again—'it is far worse for me than to be told he was ill and wanted me. I should have had all my life the comfort of knowing I was with him at the last.'

'Your comfort,' he said, 'that's what you're thinking about. *He* didn't want you.'

'I'm sure he did. He loved me.'

'Maybe,' he shrugged; 'but you don't want anybody when you're dying.'

'I shall—or should, if there were anyone who cared for me as I cared for Lord Peterborough.' Vincent sat and looked at his knees. 'This shock has thrown me back,' she went on. 'I shall not be able to go away on Saturday.'

'That's just as you feel,' he said, indifferently.

It was not till some little while after she learned of his death, that she began to realize for how much Lord Peterborough had counted, not only in the general scheme of things, but in her present perplexity. All through those last days she had been mentally arranging matters, with him for *point d'appui*. They would go away together—do this and that together. She even had a plan of taking the wise old wordling into her confidence, and letting him administer the tonic of whimsical comment. And just as she was putting out her hand to him, he had vanished from the world.

Instead of arranging to go away on Saturday, she saw Blanche Bruton and the family lawyer. She learned, that like the lady of Belmont, she was 'richly left.' She sorted and read certain of her letters—not Anton's yet, she shrank from the very touch of them. But her father's. She opened these in the order of their dates. He was 'wretched,' 'desperate,' he was 'dying.' She 'must come.' He was 'better'—he had a 'Polish nurse' who was a 'jewel.' Katharine recognised the strain, and smiled through her sadness. He would play off the Polish jewel, against his undutiful daughter. Before she broke the seals, she seemed already to have read the letters that followed. But now she saw there was a gap of three weeks, and then—a note dated from the Hôtel Ritz in Paris. 'I am here with my wife.' He had married the Polish jewel!

When Vincent came back on Monday she told him.

'I haven't the faintest notion what to do. Mrs. Bruton wants me to go with them to Egypt. But——' She looked at him.

'Well, why not?'

'I thought you objected to our "teetotum" ways.'

'You must go where you can get pure air for a few weeks—it doesn't matter where it is.'

* * * * *

She found herself too weak even to see properly to her mourning. Couldn't stand to have clothes tried, couldn't bear the weight of them when they were made. It was out of the question to go anywhere with people who rushed about, and sight-saw or did anything strenuous. Together with an even abnormal activity of mind and fancy, a great physical lassitude lay heavy upon her. She finished a poem on the Land of Counterpane, and the two sonnets she had written during her 'isolation' suddenly fell into place in the newly and more vividly seen 'Sequence' which eagerly she planned. She tried to think of the future, and saw only Vincent's frowning face. 'I will go away somewhere for a little, with only Natalie,' she determined—and the sea-air shall clear my brain of all the cobwebs that I've collected in this room. I shall let the sunlight in, and then have a look at life's possibilities.

'I am going to Torquay,' she announced to Vincent.

'That's all right. Who with?'

'My maid.'

'To visit people?'

'No.'

'It won't do you any good to be bored. Why not take somebody along, or let someone join you?'

'I'm not in the mood for people.' Then, fixing him steadily for an instant: 'I am not well, you know, even yet.'

'Of course you're not well. How should you be? Seven weeks of sense won't always redeem—how many years is it of foolishness?' She was silent. He was pretending he had forgotten her age. Twice already he had asked it, just as several times he had put other leading questions over again. At first she had thought that his memory, charged with so many 'cases,' had very naturally tripped. But it was too retentive of trifles for

her long to hold that error fast. Little by little she had divined the man's invincible unbelief in the truth of people's testimony. His psychology was sound, at least, in that, while he knew most people can upon occasion lie, few people can manage to tell the same lie, at long intervals, in different moods, and under widely varying circumstances. 'You're only better,' he said at last, seeing that this time she was not going to answer.

'But I want to be well. Oh, I want dreadfully to be well. There's no reason, is there, why I shouldn't be?' He looked at her in that curious grudging fashion that she had come to know.

'You've had too much of everything in your life, except one.'

'You mean rest?'

'Oh, you've caught up some of that.'

'What is it I have lacked?'

'You wouldn't like me to tell you.'

'Yes, I would,' but her heart misgave her. 'What is it I have lacked?'

'A man.'

She drew a startled breath as if he'd struck her.

'I suppose,' he went on brutally, 'you've taken credit for your way of life. It's been your destruction—very near.' Not a word was uttered by either for some seconds. Then: 'Do you want it put more plainly?'

'No, no,' she shuddered; 'you are plain enough.' But his sullen eyes seemed to own no wish to spare her any hurt he could inflict.

'You'd better just look about you as quick as you can,' he said coarsely. 'It's no time for nonsense, no time for sentiment or—Poetry!' He brought the word out venomously. 'Get the first help you can to repair your past foolishness. Good-bye. And remember! Even poetic ladies are human! Good-bye.'

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She established herself with Natalie in rooms that looked on the sea. For a whole week she walked, and drove, and slept and fought her dreams. A wire from Anton ran: 'Only just learned your address. Shall be down to-night.' And that same morning she fled to Ventnor, leaving only the London address behind. On the cliffs overlooking the Solent, Katharine read

the accumulated letters and old telegrams from Berlin, that she might realize 'whereabouts he is.' Dismay fell upon her as she read, to feel him so close to her again. So ghastly close! What phrases he used! How dared he? Why, of course he dared. He had seen her glow under his caressing German. Surely there is more intimacy conveyed by the German tongue than any other men can speak. There is in Italian a certain barrier of high courtesy, in French a formal elegance, in English an implication of reticence, but in German! Ah, how dared he write her in such terms—things a man might say to a chambermaid? And he was full of meeting—meeting! 'And no parting ever again.' Each letter more earnest than the last. Well, somebody cared for her, after all!

She sat wrapped in furs, on a high-perched balcony, looking at the pale sunshine on the sea, and trying to forecast what was to come.

There was danger for her in her present mood, in that thought: somebody cared. Danger of a vulgar kind she felt. She saw herself sinking, after the long fight, into a relation to Prince Anton morganatic, not merely socially questionable, but in essence evil, because accepted now as a miserable makeshift, with none of the old innocence and faith. Besides, *now* it would be a kind of treason. Her heart, her very blood, were full of another. She dropped her hands over her eyes, and then shrank back into the light. For in the dark of covered eyes, she saw Vincent in that last merciless mood of his.

And was she to follow his brutal counsel—go away with Anton, or stay in England as Bertie's wife?

Nothing easier to Vincent's view. And she exonerated him from baseness in her mind. These were matters hid from men. For it is only woman who suffers through the burden of mere sex. Men have the permission of public opinion to evade this suffering. A grant derived from the mighty men of old who established that Public Opinion, through which to-day even the weak male finds liberty—finds immunity from the grosser burden of the flesh. The bold initiative of the men of old, survives, too, in the accepted privilege of the man to 'propose' to the woman—and to take rebuff without injury to his self-esteem.

But is not woman as old as man? Why did she not in those

robuster times, even while accepting the yoke of labour and subserviency, why did she not employ her thousand arts and all her subtle strength to compass liberty in this respect at least? Why, with the very beginning of civilization, do we find the woman commonly cherishing chastity in fact as well as in appearance? For the children's sake, say the historians, or out of fear of the male. But the explanation leaves too much out of account. Small doubt the male preferred it so, but he had an ally in the woman's heart, or he would as little have prevailed, as she to-day to keep him true to an ideal yet unrealized.

The root of woman's suffering (and of her rarest joy; Katharine saw the one as clearly as the other) lay deeper than any mere lack of custom's sanction to escape from the importunity of the flesh. Were it otherwise, woman had ages ago been free, and left freedom unattainted a heritage to all her daughters. 'But she will never be free,' said the prisoner, in the little iron-bound balcony above the sea. Not for her, except in the lower types, the satisfaction men find in the temporary, the makeshift; the soothing of the body, while the soul sleeps.

No reasonable woman, to Katharine's thinking, would make this difference a ground for any assumption of superiority. Just as surely as her body is made something different from man's so in this is her soul different. It is the mark of the feminine on the spirit, this hunger for the special, for the one that out of all the world alone is hers, the one that, whatever he may do, she is bound to hold herself sacred to. It is only the woman who knows that this is true, even before motherhood teaches her monogamy's significance to society. Any man may give her a child, but only one can give her what even more than that blessing, her soul and her body hunger for. Yes, it was clear enough to her now. This knowledge (instinct, rather), far more than custom, or any feeble clinging to the outward forms of respectability—this it was that kept so many neglected wives and single women chaste. They cannot help feeling: 'If I do not weary—if I am not false, he will surely come.' They look abroad, and they do not see him. The years go by, and they will presently be old; but waiting so they prove their faith.

Staring out to the grey sailless sea, she faced the truth, formulated it once for all. We are each in the prison of our sex, we

women. The tragic thing—the glad thing, too—is that to each prison is a single key. And the man who holds it may never even see the outer walls behind which we wait.

‘Nevertheless, we wait,’ she said in her heart.

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Thoughts like these are haggard company, though they wear their weariness with a certain grace.

What, precisely, had been in his mind when at the last he gave her that ‘coarse counsel’? It flashed over her—there could be no greater proof of her irremediable love for the man, than that she could throw such an epithet at him, and yet find him standing firm, unshaken by so much as a hair, on his pedestal in her heart. And all her life she had been called fastidious, hypersensitive. Suppose any other man had dared speak so! No paleness now—her face a flame at the mere imagining. But Garth Vincent—he might say what he would. She belonged to him. Many a wife belonged less to her husband, than she belonged to this man who had never shown a sign of affection, or even of ordinary sensitiveness to the fact that she was a woman.

* * * * *

Three weeks had gone. Was Time helping her? Not a whit. Still he coloured all the world. Abandoning herself to her dreams, she said to her pillow: ‘Of what use to fight?—he has got into my blood.’

There were moods in which she persuaded herself that it would all come right. Even if he had come to care for her, he could never have told her so, she was sure, while she was under his care—his patient. She had never heard the etiquette of such a situation discussed, but she felt it would be his view, inflexibly adhered to. So he might, all the time, have been caring for her and still have made no sign. Should she go back and see? Even if (as was more probable, she confessed) he did not yet care, why should he not come to? Men had not found it hard. Evidently his distrust of woman was deep, his contempt ready. Evidently he had suffered at their hands. ‘But I live alone,’ he had told her. And the workers under him had said, ‘there is no lonelier man.’ And yet he was human—ah, very, very human.

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Driving past the pier one morning, she saw the young Duchess

of Worcester afoot—alone. Katharine stopped the victoria and greeted her. 'I am worn out with nursing,' she said, and in truth looked it. 'George is no better,' and they talked of the sad case of a young and gallant soldier whose life was crushed, almost extinguished, not upon the field of battle, but in a South African fever camp. As his wife talked on, Katharine found herself asking, 'Who sent him here?'

'Nobody. I felt he was being killed in London, and in a fit of desperation I brought him away. And you've been rather ill yourself.'

'Tired chiefly—and my heart, you know——'

'Yes, I remember.'

Katharine was so tempted to ask if they had tried consulting Garth Vincent, that she said as little as possible, hardly dared open her lips, in truth, lest the name should jump out. 'Who has the Duke consulted?' One name after another. Not his. They parted with a plan to meet and walk next day, 'if George can spare me.'

The following morning Katharine drove out the mile and a half to the villa they had taken. The Duchess was in better case. He had slept better. Katharine heard the good news with a lack of enthusiasm that shamed her. They walked an hour, talking of common friends, and somewhat of Katharine's poem (the first written 'In Isolation,' as she called the October sonnet) which had just been published. The Duchess had a pretty taste in literature, and considerable acquaintance with the poets. Things she said that morning made her companion thrill with an exquisite joy: the joy of seeing that some instructed and sensitive soul has caught and shared your mood of passion or of insight, has felt the fine blending of pleasure and surprise at some felicity of phrase, or a rhyme, that came like a gift of God, smiting one with the sudden gladness that other treasure-seekers know, when in some midnight cave they stumble on a heap of gold. Under very different conditions Katharine was to remember and be fired afresh by the Duchess's enthusiasm. Just now, not poetry, but life, called trumpet-tongued.

The next day the Duchess was to drive into Ventnor for Katharine. But instead came a note:

He is worse. I dare not leave him. I am distracted. Won't

you come and lunch here? Katharine carried a clear plan out to the ugly villa that grey morning—a plan that filled her world with sunlight, and set her eyes to shining behind her veil.

‘Oh, my dear, I am very frightened. We seem to have tried everything.’ Katharine held herself back by main force from crying out, ‘Fool! You haven’t tried the only thing that can avail!’—looked merely sympathetic, thoughtful. Some minutes later, ‘It’s considered a dangerous thing,’ she said, ‘recommending doctors, but you haven’t tried mine, I believe.’

‘Yours?’

‘Yes—Garth Vincent.’

‘Oh, I remember hearing you had been in his hands. But I’ve been so absorbed—— Yes, of course. A—did you like him?’

‘Vincent? Well, “like” is perhaps hardly the word.’

‘So I hear,’ laughed the Duchess. ‘People either say “genius” and roll their eyes mysteriously, or else they say “charlatan” and curse.’

‘Oh, I don’t think I do either. What lovely mimosa!’

‘Of course he’s been in our minds many times, but——’

‘Your other doctors have dissuaded you. They would.’

‘Well, are you glad you went to him?’

‘Glad? Oh yes.’

‘He did you good?’

‘I’m a new creature. And I was a specially baffling case. He’s had the greatest success with troubles like the Duke’s.’

‘Yes, yes, so I’ve said to George. We’ve even been upon the point——’ The harassed wife put question after question for the next half-hour.

Twice Katharine made a move to go. ‘You must be tired. I’m sure you ought to lie down.’

‘No. No. You must tell me all you can about Dr. Vincent.’ Katharine sat calm and self-possessed to all appearance, speaking dispassionate sentences about the great specialist. But she chose her words not only, not chiefly, for their air of discrimination and their coolness. She spared no art to make them effectual, while they seemed so measured and judicial. She changed the subject now and then, but at junctures that made her sure the Duchess would return to it forthwith.

The next day: 'I wrote to Dr. Vincent yesterday,' was the Duchess's greeting. 'I can't think why he doesn't wire when he will come. I asked him to.'

'Probably waiting to see if he can manage to leave his London patients long enough.' Katharine allowed herself to be persuaded to stay to luncheon again. She felt she could not go home without knowing what his answer was. It was there by three o'clock.

'He'll come down to-morrow,' said her hostess, reading.

Saturday! That was what Katharine had expected. 'Does he say what train?'

'No. Let's look them out. I hope he won't just fly in and fly out, as they say he usually does.'

'That's his great fault, *I* think,' admitted Katharine. 'But, as one of his nurses says, he can tell more about your inside by looking at you, than others can by cutting you open—however, a new patient doesn't, can't, realize how miraculous he is at diagnosis. He is apt to lessen a person's confidence by so much despatch.'

'Oh, my dear,' the anxious face was full of sudden alarm. 'George will be sure to think——'

'Why,' interrupted Katharine, 'why don't you nail him?'

'Who?'

'Vincent.'

'I wish I could.'

'Wire and ask him to dine.'

'Will that do it?' she smiled. Katharine's loyalty took quick alarm.

'He's no more likely to say yes to you, my dear, than to anybody else—but he must dine somewhere, and time will be a consideration.' They concocted a telegram.

'You'll come and help me out, won't you? I feel rather nervous—after all I've heard—such contradictory things. And there's so much at stake.' Her eyes suddenly filled.

Katharine stayed on, upon her urging, from hour to hour, till it was too late to go home to dine. As she passed through the hall on the way to the carriage at half-past nine, she saw a paper that looked familiar lying on the table. 'Isn't that your telegram?' It was. The flustered new footman had forgotten it.

Katharine consoled the Duchess by saying she would take it herself, and so make sure of its going. 'How good you are! I'll never forget what you've been to me to-day. When will you come to-morrow?—as early as you can. By eleven?'

'If you like.'

'You're an angel.'

* * * *

'I've had no answer about dining,' were the Duchess's first words when Katharine reappeared.

'Then he'll come. But when? Better have each train met.' And orders were given. The Duchess longed to ask Katharine to go herself to meet and to make sure of him. Katharine longed to propose it. Neither spoke of such a thing. Katharine consoled herself by a vision of him at dinner. Saw him in imagination throw off his 'doctor's gown'—saw him smiling, friendly—saw him after, left alone with her, while their hostess went away to the sick-room.

'I've come to feel that everything depends upon this visit,' said the Duchess, nervously walking up and down before the fire.

'Yes,' said Katharine. The sound of carriage wheels. They stopped. Footsteps in the hall—in the hall?—surely he came walking in over Katharine's Dereham heart.

Indeed yes, everything depended upon this visit.

The footman was announcing 'Dr. Vincent.' The Duchess went forward. They spoke, and Vincent's eye fell on the other figure. Katharine rose up, and gave her hand. 'You're surprised?'

'I thought you were at Torquay. You're looking better;' and he turned sharply away from her to the Duchess, who was saying:

'Won't you have tea or something before you——'

'Oh no—no, thank you'—in so brusque a fashion that Katharine exchanged a hasty look of encouragement with her hostess as much as to say: 'That's nothing.'

'I'll go up at once.'

'I hope you're going to stay and dine,' said the anxious wife, leading the way to the door.

'I'm sorry. It's quite impossible—I must get back to-night. Unless——' He left it, but Katharine felt the only thing that

would keep him would be mortal illness, and her hope died. She sat alone in the fire-lit drawing-room, till the Duchess came back.

‘He wouldn’t let me be there, too—says he’ll see me afterwards.’ They tried to talk of indifferent things.

‘I wish we had wood fires here. Don’t you love them?’

‘Yes, the scent of burning wood—— He is good-looking,’ said the Duchess.

‘Better looking in this light than he is by day.’

‘I don’t believe you like him.’

‘Oh yes, I do.’

‘I do. And if he cures George I shall adore him.’ Katharine smiled: but she was heavy-hearted. She must have speech of him, but how—how? ‘He says you look well. I don’t agree with him. You are tired to-day.’

‘I believe I am. I haven’t been sleeping as I ought.’

‘Didn’t you sleep last night?’—in that way in which such questions are put to all, save the one or two, who sit at the heart of life.

‘No, I didn’t sleep. I can’t think why. Do you know, I’ve half a notion not to stay and dine, since you won’t need me now. It will save those poor horses of yours if I go back to town with Vincent. It will save them another trip.’

When Vincent came down, Katharine, leaving him alone with Duchess, went to make ready. Five minutes later she stood buttoning her gloves in the hall. The drawing-room door was shut; the sound of voices came muffled through. Katharine stood there a long while, buttoning and unbuttoning the long gray suède. Is he expecting me back? Is he spinning out the talk that he may see me again? Does he care the least in the world? Wouldn’t he stay and dine if he did? What am I going to say to him? What will he say to me? She opened the front-door and looked out. The carriage-lamps shone through a white fog. The night was very raw. The coachman loomed gigantic in his great bear-skin cape. A door was opening behind her. Vincent came out, followed by the Duchess. ‘Yes, the sooner the better for him,’ he was saying.

‘Then we will go up on Monday.’ He was putting on his coat. ‘And you’ll come in——’

'Tuesday at three. Good-bye.'

A sudden absurd shyness seized Katharine. She was ashamed of standing there, hatted and gloved, so obviously waiting for him. He turned, looking for his umbrella, caught sight of her, and stared. The footman presented the umbrella, while the Duchess was saying: 'Miss Dereham is going back to Ventnor, too.'

They were bowling along the road, lights twinkling in upon them dimly—a ghostly white mist enveloping the world.

'How do you find the Duke?'

'Oh, he's been doing all the wrong things, so, of course——' Then a silence, wrapping them coldly like a spiritual counterpart of the fog.

Suddenly Katharine said: 'What an odd life yours must be!'

'Why?'

'To come to know people so dreadfully well for a little while, so much better than their nearest and dearest—and then to see them drop out of your sight like a stone into a well.'

He said nothing; and she, acting on an impulse too swift to parry; 'I wonder what you're like outside of your profession?'

'Oh, everybody is pretty much alike.'

'I don't find it so. But many people wear their experience writ large. About most, you can at all events get an idea. But I've no notion what your history is. I'm ignorant even of the outlines.' Her voice had begun to shake. With an effort she spoke more lightly and more firmly. 'But that's because I don't know anyone who knows you—except as a doctor.'

'No one does know me—except as a doctor.'

'Who of your family are living?'

'Nobody.'

Why did he not tell her of the step-brother? 'Is everybody dead?'

'Pretty well everybody. All those nearest to me.'

'Where did you go to school?'

'I went to a good many schools. I never stayed at one.'

'You studied medicine?'

'Yes, that was quite late.'

'But what did you do with the years when other people are in school?'

'I've told you I was always running away.'

'Where did you run to?'

'The East: India, Japan. The West: Mexico, Chili, the Argentine.' Then quite suddenly, 'Oh, I've been everywhere. I've seen it all,' and his tone did not endorse the Maker's verdict that it was good.

'I don't believe you've seen it all. I believe you've seen only the worst of many things. Especially of women.'

'What makes you think that?'

'I'm sure of it.'

He laughed disagreeably. 'They can't humbug me as they used to.'

'Ah! The very word Woman, for you means deceit. Yes, you must have had a bad time.' He looked out of the window a moment into the fog, and then drew his head in. But he said nothing. 'It's rather a pity, I think, to have known so few nice women that you——'

'Not many "nice,"' he interrupted. 'But I've known plenty.'

Katharine remembered some of the smart women who frequented him. Does he think we are all like Imogen Bailey and Anne Minton?

As if he heard the silent question: 'They're very much alike.'

'Who are?'

'Women. They all have the same constitutional failing.'

'And that is——?'

But he did not wait for the question. 'They begin to lie the minute they come into the consulting-room. And they lie till I've seen the last of them. Lie about their habits, their age, their past—even, by God! about their symptoms! Lie to *me!*' and as a street light for a moment faintly lit up the dark interior of the carriage, she saw the satirical grin on his face,—'as if I were one of their little tame-cat-men, or artist idiots, and couldn't read the facts under the powder on their faces and under the skin of their rotten bodies.'

Katharine, shrinking into her corner, had a sudden glimpse of a portion of that history she had failed to elicit. Here was a man who spent his life in the search after, and the practice of, accuracy. The deceit of the less admirable, the vagueness of even the better sort among women, had added to his misogyny

and to his brutality. The thing that he hated most, he was doomed oftenest to encounter.

'And then they complain of me because *I* don't lie,' he burst out suddenly. She was conscious that he had turned, and was trying to catch a glimpse of her face, as the now frequent lights shone in an instant and then flitted by. 'It's all very well,' he went on, as if in answer to some criticism, 'all very well to say truth is compatible with courtesy. In a perfect world it would be so, in a damned world like this, full of lying, nervous people——'

'I never lied to you,' came a low, quiet voice out of Katharine's corner. As he did not answer at once: 'Did you ever think I did?'

'I never caught you,' he said discontentedly.

They were rattling into the station.

'What have you been doing with yourself here?' he asked suddenly.

'Trying to get strong.'

'How?'

'With the help of sleep, air, and the little sun there is.'

'You're not alone?'

'Yes, I am alone.' The carriage had stopped.

'That's bad.' The groom opened the door.

'I want to get a paper,' she said blindly, longing to postpone that loneliness that he so truly said was 'bad.' She went to the news-stand, and bought one thing after another. He followed her, and stood looking on. She had her arms full now, and no excuse to linger.

'Well, I suppose I must say good-bye.'

'I'll put you in the carriage,' he said with unexpected civility. As they walked back, Katharine dropped one of her papers. He picked it up. They stood a moment under the station lamp.

'Don't come any farther,' she said desperately, 'you—you'll only have time to get some of their horrid tea before your train goes.'

'Let me see your face.'

'My—my face?' Her head was drooping, she had an aching wish to hide it.

'Yes, hold up your face.' She did as she was bid, with a sudden summoning of pride. But something in the bold eyes frightened her. Involuntarily she lowered her own.

'*Look at me.*' Was it the doctor spoke, or was it—— She lifted the down-dropped lids an instant, but shrank before something in the look, she could not be sure what, but something——'Oh, God in Heaven, give it a name! Let me, at least, *know!*' And even while she prayed, she was in full flight, crying over her shoulder 'Good-bye.'

CHAPTER II

‘WHY did he want to see my face? What was he looking for there? What did he find?’ Half the night the questions hunted her, up the hills and down the dales of tossing wakefulness. ‘Oh, he cares! He cares!’ she would say from time to time, and all her blood made holiday. ‘But why then. . . . Is he afraid to risk it? Does he remember the old rebuff? Can he still be uncertain of me . . . think I’m ready to play with him? No—no, he is just indifferent. A little curious. But he doesn’t care at all.’

The blackness of that knowledge would envelop her wholly for a while. Then, here a rift, and there a rent, through which would shine a little light.

‘Even with all the illness, I’m not hideous. I care so much, that I shall *make* him care. I’ll go back to town.’

And in the morning she said again: ‘I’ll go back to town!’ But where? Bertie would be installed at Peterborough House. Blanche in Egypt. Where should she go? The world was curiously lonely; but what did it matter? After all, she wanted only one person among London’s millions, and him she would find at his post.

While making her arrangements for returning and putting her fate to the test, Katharine definitely set aside the contemplated plan of establishing herself at once in some attractive house, sending to Paris for her mother’s beautiful old cousin, the Marquise de Courcelles, who was willing to exile herself from France, she wrote, for the sake of being with Katharine.

Easy enough for Miss Dereham to surround herself with the glamour, that in London so easily aureoles a woman such as she. Easy enough when the spell was wrought, to bid Vincent come and see how he withstood it.

But Katharine realized that it would be an impossible vulgarity that she should try to play upon, to dazzle and 'lead on' this man. 'A shallower soul than mine,' she said to herself, 'would feel the impossibility of that, after all those days that there alone in Peterborough House, we fought the great fight against disease. Even if he were willing, I simply *cannot* receive him as I receive other men—still less can I lay traps for love. No, not even for his. But I can go back to town. I can send for him or go to him—give him at least the chance to speak. What was he looking for in my face? Perhaps he'll tell me. To-morrow! To-morrow I shall be in London—his London and mine.'

Only one more day in this windswept little house, with its balcony looking out upon the passing ships.

How many hours she had spent on that chill perch! This was the last time she would sit, watching the pale winter sunshine flicker on the cliffs, and fall in lines of flecked brightness on the ruffled sea. She drew her furs closer about her throat, and leaned over the balcony rail to watch some tiny children, climbing up a steep place, jutting over the sands. Now they stood on the crest of the height, and Katharine's gaze moved townwards. Far down the one bit of straight street, Natalie coming home with the fruit and tea-cake.

Suddenly from behind the chair a sound; the opening of the glass door, and the landlady's quavering voice: 'If you please, Miss, a gentleman is here to see you.' There was only one man in the world, and he was here! Katharine turned sharply as the rusty figure of the woman drew back. Every drop of blood went hurrying to meet him—making festival to the tune: Garth Vincent! Garth! Garth!

But time and tune were rudely changed, as she saw what presence filled the little French window.

'Anton!' After speaking the name she did not stir, but sat with wide eyes staring at the big figure, to which the long straight lines of the overcoat gave back some of the old elegance—noted how he dwarfed the room behind him, the whole house; noted the broad satisfaction of the face, took in even the elongated white paper parcel that, lightly held, dropped downward from thumb and finger. He stooped and came out upon the balcony, smiling gaily.

'Ah!' he composed his features. 'How pale you are!' He looked at her tenderly, her hand in his, and then glanced back to make sure the rusty female had departed.

'Dear child, it was very wrong of you not to write to me. And cruel not to let me come and nurse you back to health. Why have you taken it into your head that just because you are ill I am to be cut off from you? I can't have that, you know!'—all in a breath, smiling caressingly and detaining the hand that he had taken.'

'I haven't been seeing my friends.'

'Your *friends*!' he laughed indulgently, and stooped to lay the white paper parcel on the long box of dry earth, that fronted the balcony railing, and wherein three forlorn dead geraniums held fast a few brown leaves. Fresh green stems stuck out from one end of the paper—stems with rose thorns on them. How truly German! He was bringing her a Sträusschen as any Bursch might his Mädchen.

But behind the thought, unconsciously prompting it, was the feeling that Vincent, had he come on such an errand as she knew had brought the Prince, Vincent would as soon have brought a bomb-shell as a bunch of roses. She had watched Anton bending stiffly down to lay the parcel on the flower-box, and the unromantic thought occurred to her: For a man to go in so at the hip . . . he must be laced. But even if she were wrong about that, there was the drop of the heavy jowl, the straw-coloured hair thinning at the top, the sodden look of the man who has overfed, and overslept, and overdrunk, and overdone all pleasure, and wholly missed the tonic of hard work and the fining down of self-discipline.

'Do they know who you are, here?' she asked.

He shook his head. 'Incog.' Now he was standing close to her again, looking down at her with a smile. 'It shan't hurt you to be with me.' It was manifest that in his mind, the only possible explanation of her evasion of him, was that she feared herself not sufficiently strong to bear the rapture of his presence. Either that or else (his eyes, gentle and full of genuine pity, were searching the white face), even more pardonable, in his mind, her fear that she was not yet in sufficient good looks to meet 'the most fastidious eye in Europe.' 'Poor child, you've been dreadfully ill.'

'No, I can't honestly say I have.'

'Nonsense! I know better.'

'You judge by my looks?'

'I judge by your inhuman treatment of me.' Then, as she offered no excuse: 'You look adorable! I like you even better pale. But it's time I came to see after you. Why do you sit out here in December trying to catch your death of cold? Let us go inside.'

'No,' she said, 'I like it here. The air does me good.'

'Air! Yes, if it were Algiers, or even Arcachon yonder.' He shivered. But Katharine laid her elbow on the railing, and supported her cheek on her hand. With obvious unwillingness, gingerly even, he took the other seat, a rusty iron chair not over clean.

'Are you afraid of being faint if you go inside?' he asked, scanning her marble features for sign of over excitement.

'No, not exactly faint.'

'H'm!' He gave it up, dismissed it in favour of something even more pressing. 'Katharine,' he leaned forward, 'I've just been to Waldenstein and seen my brother.'

'Well, and how is Prince Heinrich?'

'Less unreasonable as he grows older. Less disposed to dictate. He's got four boys of his own now to look after—and to succeed him.'

'Ah!' said Katharine.

'And he always admired you immensely.'

'He is very good.'

'No, he isn't good. But all the same, it counts for a great deal. He's quite of our view at last.' Katharine stared at the dead geraniums.

'I saw the old Chancellor, too, as I came through Berlin. It can all be managed.' Her face was absolutely expressionless. A little wind had come up out of the sea. Suddenly the Prince of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein rose to his feet: 'I can't talk of it out here in this truly English chill—do come inside.' She lifted her head, and let the hand that had supported it fall and fasten on the iron railing with an instinct of anchoring herself.

'I am sorry you find it disagreeable here, but I never sit in that little room.'

His look dulled. He was ill-accustomed to find his wishes unregarded. But as his eye fell again upon Katharine he seemed

to forget the slight affront. 'No wonder. What a place for you!' With a backward glance of suspicion he took the rusty chair again. 'Dear child'—he laid his hand on hers—'I've come to carry you away with me. Everything is *en train*——'

'Anton,' she began hurriedly—but his voice, low, hurried, eager, struck in and silenced her.

'You think it's soon, but there's no need for anything to be announced, you know, until we like.'

Ah! she had expected that. But she showed no sign.

'At the same time, even if it should come out—all the world knows that Margaretha and I never got on together.' He made a motion with the left hand—the one still tightly gloved and having the stuffed-to-bursting aspect of fat fingers forced into exactly-fitting dogskin. The gesture seemed an appeal to all reasonable minds to admit that the fact of having made his late wife unhappy was excuse sufficient for slighting her memory. 'I shall take you back to London this afternoon.' She started and opened her lips; but again he hurried on, 'As I say, everything is *en train*——'

'I cannot go, Anton,' she struck in. 'I—I cannot even discuss it.'

'You don't understand, dear.' He smiled indulgently, but he straightened his military back and lifted his handsome chin. 'I want you to be my wife.' Then as Katharine's white face mounted no flush, showed no radiance, he suddenly bent forward again, and scrutinized her as one does a person of whom one has heard something that sheds a great light—reversing all former views. 'You haven't taken it into your head that you're going to die?'

Katharine laughed, with more of bitterness than she had ever shown him; seeing how from his point of view, if she would not be his wife there could be only one reason. But: 'I'm likely to live as long as anybody,' she said.

'Then what's this about not marrying! Of course you'll marry me. Ah, my dear, I never knew what happiness was till that moment came when I was free!'

'Don't, Anton,'—poor dead woman who had given him thus, his happiest hour!

'But it was too bad to have you hidden away from me in a

sick-room, and that outrageous boor of a doctor who had hypnotized the servants—I came over, you know.'

'You *came!* In spite of my warning.'

'Of course I came.'

'Natalie has never told me!'

'Had her orders, I suppose, and so afraid of that brute—but my coming was no use. I never had such an experience in my life.' He brushed his sharp upturned moustachios fiercely right and left. 'I didn't give in readily. I stopped writing, but I came a second time after Peterborough's death.'

'Who did you see?'

'It's the greatest wonder I didn't shoot that medical man of yours,' he said, squaring himself in the little iron chair.

Katharine smiled faintly. 'You might have challenged him to a duel'—a delicious picture. Garth Vincent summoned to deadly combat, by the most accomplished swordsman in Europe, and responding with a 'Go to the devil!' or something equally elegant.

'Challenge a pill-box! Hardly. But that's all done for.' Again he laid his right hand over hers. She did not withdraw, but with the other, held still faster to the cold iron of the railing. His mouth and eyes were smiling—'Thank God, you're better, and I'm free——'

'The trouble is, Anton, that *I'm* not free.' The smile did not instantly leave his face—it yielded little by little to bewilderment.

'Not—— What, in the name of God, do you mean?'

'Just that. I'm not any longer free. I belong to someone else.'

'*You belong—* Someone else? I won't believe it. You're raving.' Then as Katharine said nothing, sat there with the flush in her cheeks and the light in her eyes, that he had waited for in vain before: 'You belong to *me*,' he said, and threw back his head.

She felt for an instant something of the old beauty in his face; but she went on sadly, quietly: 'It is only fair that I should treat you candidly, though I haven't told anyone else——'

'Who is it?' he interrupted. Katharine had no idea the caressing voice could be so brusque. 'Who is it?' he repeated.

'That, I am not bound to say.'

'You don't mean to tell me that you consider yourself engaged—to somebody else?'

'N—no. That is—the man is free.'

'I don't understand you.'

Her eyes sought the dead geraniums, and rested on the crumpled leaves. 'Don't understand how a woman may be bound and a man be free?'

'I don't in the very least understand what it is that you're trying to tell me. But,' he added hurriedly, 'I don't want to. It's fantastic—a piece of delirium. You are mine!' Then as she lifted her changed face to his, he cried out suddenly: 'Katharine!' and she saw that the handsome eyes were wet. 'Why, I've loved you and waited for you, for years.' No lover, the most steadfast on earth, could have found an accent more convincing than throbbed through this last of the many professions of his faith. But she was hardly at the pains to remind herself anew in what fashion he had loved and waited. What did it all matter now? As little to her as it would when she was dust.

'Please don't speak so loud,' she had said.

'Not *free*! Did you really say not free?' But he never waited for her silent affirmation. 'Then he must release you. You must tell him that the man you have cared for since you were barely out of the schoolroom—is only now able——. Tell him you didn't know, or didn't realize. You were shut away in a sick-room. But now you've seen him and it's all different. Tell him he *must* release you!'

She smiled uneasily as a sudden vision of Vincent, listening to such words, mocked at her.

'Poor child!' The soft voice folded her again like some warm garment. 'You were lonely and desperate. I don't really blame you. But it's an ugly shock. I had such faith in you, dear. However——' He stood up, again dwarfing the balcony with his bigness, and stopping to brush some iron rust off his sleeve, with the air of one who just so lightly would do away with any impediment in the way of his plans. 'Fortunately,' he said, with a look of new purpose in his face, 'fortunately I have come in time.'

‘You are at least eight weeks too late.’

His face was suddenly quite ugly. ‘You don’t mean that you are going to keep a promise made under a total misapprehension.’

‘There is neither promise nor misapprehension.’

Again bewilderment fell upon him. ‘Then after all you *are* free.’

‘A woman is very far from free who cares as I care.’

‘For——’ He took hold of the railing as if the balcony had begun to sway and swing—‘care for some other—for this other man——’

‘For the other man.’

‘Then *I*——’ he burst out, having something on his tongue of which he obviously repented him in time. He changed to: ‘And yet the man, if I remember, is free.’ He had gripped hold of his self-control again, but his smile was far from pleasant.

‘Yes, Anton,’ she said gently. ‘He does not even know I love him. At least I think he does not. He has made no sign.’

‘Good God!’ he burst out again. ‘Made no sign? How do you know then that he will?’

‘I wish I did know.’

‘And for *this*—this school-girl’s dream you are throwing me over!’

‘Why don’t you say I am too old for such foolishness? He would.’

‘He would appear to have a gracious tongue!’ As she said nothing he looked about helplessly right and left; bewildered, like one who wakes to find himself in some new place and hunts for a clue as to how he got there. His wandering attention had the air of being suddenly arrested by concern, at seeing how the paper round his flowers had blown open at the end—how ruefully the roses hung their beautiful heads over the rim of the flower-box. Then, as with an effort, turning his eyes sharply back to Katharine’s moved, excited face, and finding there the clue: ‘How is this interesting little story going to end?’ he asked.

It was in that instant, that she saw with all the vividness of prophetic vision, that her waiting would be vain. For whatever reason, upon such slight clue as she had had in mind to give him, Garth Vincent would never speak. For whatever reason, never again would he offer her his love. And so it was, that being

called on to formulate her ground for Hope, she first saw plain the Hopelessness that waited for her.

‘I have no more idea than you have of the end.’

‘But you will sacrifice everything to waiting.’

‘Do you think you can well reproach me for being able to do that?’

‘*Ach!*’ he cried on a sudden, dropping his glove. ‘I see! You’re punishing me. You don’t really care for this man. You—— Ah-h’—it was a kind of laugh, that deep giving out of boundless relief—‘I understand at last. You have said to yourself: “He made me wait. He shall have his turn.” Very well. I will wait;’ and he sat down.

The sight of him there, the sense of his impenetrable egoism, the mere weight and bulk of his bodily presence, grew suddenly intolerable.

And he *would* wait. There in Ventnor, later in London. More patient, more persistent, more the lover now that she was out of his reach, than he had ever been before. And the thought revolted her. A protracted struggle at this time of day was too hideous. Aside from the ugliness of it, it would involve a further complication of existence that she had no strength to meet.

‘It seems you are strangely far from understanding me even yet, though I’ve tried to be plain. I hardly know how to be plainer,’—but even as she said the words, ‘a way’ flashed its sign-post before her startled eyes, and pointed a guiding finger. ‘Perhaps it will be clear, if I say that, at last, I know a man for whose sake I could do what I refused to do for you.’

‘You don’t mean——’ he began, breathless.

‘Yes, I do.’

‘It isn’t possible, Katharine, that you——’

‘Listen!’ She bent forward,—paused to cast a glance across her shoulder to the open glass door, and even though there was obviously no one in the little room—she lowered her voice. ‘I would turn my back on all the rest of the world to follow him. *Anywhere*, and without assurance of anything beyond—beyond the joy of “das reine Zusammensein.”’ He had been rigidly still—but now she saw him wince. ‘Yes, you taught me that phrase. It’s only now that I can guess at what it means.’

He turned away his eyes. A refinement of cruelty in her, a kind of intellectual indecency to use in this new connection those old words of his,—sharp reminder of the days when he had urged on her, and urged in vain, precisely this point of view. But she had done it not meaning to inflict pain—meaning only to shed full daylight. If she had these daring thoughts—if she should find arguments to make them good, had he not given them to her? They were in truth his children, and with a power to wound that only our own can wield.

‘So now,’ she said in the pause, ‘now you understand.’ He sat there perfectly still staring at the roses on the flower-box.

‘Yes,’ he said at last, speaking a little thickly, ‘I understand now.’ But still he did not go. ‘He is married, I suppose.’

‘No.’

‘Ah!’ he burst out in a kind of rage of humiliation. ‘No impediment, no excuse, and yet you sit here waiting for him to make a sign.’ She offered no denial. ‘And if he should, you’d go to him.’

She shrank. ‘I only say I could.’

‘You’ve known him—how long?’

‘You have no right to question me.’

‘No *right!* I have the best right in all the world. The right of a man who has loved you for years, and who wants to save you from a ghastly mistake. It is, of course, some quite new acquaintance.’ A sudden look in his face, or else the fear in her own tortured heart, made her jump to the conclusion that he was on the point of guessing. But for that she would have declined to answer. As it was, and to put him off the track, she said hurriedly: ‘I have known him a long time.’

‘What? And he doesn’t give you the smallest reason to think——’ She shook her head. He laughed unpleasantly. ‘Then I’ll wait until you are tired of watching for it.’

A feeling as of one struggling in a nightmare strangled her. Was there no way to shake him off? ‘Anton, I—I won’t wait. If he makes no sign I’ll go to him——’ She stopped an instant before the look in his face. ‘Why not?’ she said a little wildly. ‘If it were thinkable that a woman of character and standing should be morganatic wife to a Prince, why not to this First of Men—if he will have it so—if *he will!*’ The solid world about

her went swimming out of sight, as she let her head drop on arms folded on the railing. She did not know how long she sat there, but when she lifted her tear-wet eyes, Prince Anton was disappearing through the French window without one backward look.

But he had pointed out the way!

She sat motionless there in the rising wind, heard the house door close, heard steps go down the side street, under the balcony—listened to them growing fainter, with an overwhelming sense of the sadness of life, the pitiful evanescence of the things we call enduring.

The thought of Vincent made her shrink a little now, and yet brought close upon that shrinking a reproach as of disloyalty. For it was no *real* thing that was disappearing down the narrow street. It was a dream, a phantasm. Not youth and love that were going out of her life! No! She had said good-bye to an incarnate lie. Why was she so sad? Shame upon her. She stood up, thinking to go to her room. As she turned away, her eyes were caught, as by an appeal from the neglected roses, that hung their heads down over the end of the old flower-box. Crying softly, she lifted them in her hands. They brushed against the dry geraniums—broke off a leaf. The brown and shrivelled thing whispered something as it rustled across the rim of the box, and went flying down the street like a belated messenger at the Prince's heels.

CHAPTER III

SHE did not, after all, go up to London on the morrow, but stayed on at Ventnor, day after day, so little certain in which direction to turn that she stood stock still.

If all unwitting, Anton had pointed out 'the way,' his visit had lamed her spirit, and taken from her the moment's courage to set her feet upon so strange a path. Ten days went by. Then, very early one morning, she rang for Natalie. 'I must go back to town. Immediately. By the 1.10.'

Once in London, the tonic spirit of the place, the sense that the grey and ancient town invariably brought back, of there being here a concentration of mighty forces at work, a place of huge happening, of mystery, achievement, and boundless possibility, of destiny a-making—all wrought in her afresh to a renewal of the spirit. And *he* was here. Garth Vincent daily went his way through these enchanted streets. It was here that they would meet. Here that she would come to know. . . .

The mood of daring born in that hour of revolt against Prince Anton, came back insistent, almost joyous. Why not? Days before Anton had found her there at Ventnor, she had known that shame would tarnish any attempt that she might make to take Garth Vincent in or to take him unaware—to win him to her by any devious way of subtlety or wile. To-night in London, she could say to herself with a sense of exhilaration, that there would be, for her at least, a certain honour in openness of dealing—even though it brought her pain, even though it brought the blow of blank denial. It must be possible to lift the supreme question of life into that high region where feminine pretences and small reserves are left as far below, as light clouds under Alpine climbers.

Why not? She leaned out of the hansom as she drove through the crowded streets, saying the two little words of Fate over and over to herself between intervals of justification.

Why not? Why should it be impossible to take her love to him, and offer it quite openly, saying: 'Without your seeking or my will, this has come. It is no such common thing. Women and men, too, wait all their lives for such a gift. I dare not be ashamed.' One would even give it proudly, with a sense of bounty—if the giving were less sweet.

The magic of the London mood lasted till she turned into Westminster Bridge Road.

A gaunt, ungainly figure in a nurse's close bonnet, and long straight cloak, crossed hurriedly under the horse's head. The starched white bow under the woman's chin recalled Nurse Phillips—recalled the days that she had been a part of, and the pains that Katharine had taken to hide her true state from the nurse; above all, to hide it from Him, the Healer. But that was long ago, before she realized what had befallen her. Before she belonged to him. And she said the last phrase over solemnly, as one reciting a part of the office of a sacrament. She had no longer any sense of the voluntary choosing of a course. Whether she liked it or not, whether she struggled or acquiesced, he was a part of her already. Whether for health, purifying, strengthening; or like a fever, devouring the blood—only that remained to know. And for that knowledge was she come to town.

Nearly four-and-twenty hours went by, and still the first step towards acquirement not alone was not taken; it was not even clear in what fashion it should be essayed. Thursday! and to-morrow he would be going to the country. The thought brought a feverish sense of need for sharp despatch, and yet the note of summons that she vaguely meant to write was still unsent, unformulated. Each time she sat down with a sheet of paper before her, it had instantly seemed an easier thing to go to him. 'Difficult missions were best conducted by word of mouth,' she said to herself, satirically; and then, gravely: 'a look will often save a sentence, save a situation; the withholding of a word speak volumes.' She would push the paper from her, and rise up full of the new purpose.

Go to him! Be admitted by a man with a patient's appoint-

ment book?—have such an interview, *any* interview with Garth Vincent now, in a consulting room? Hideous, grotesque, intolerable. And she would sit down again, begin a note, tear it up, and go for a walk—twice to the Park, and many times back and forth, back and forth through her suite of rooms.

And now it was Friday. Whatever came, she must have speech of him to-day—or else be left over Saturday, and Sunday, in a London where he was not. She would send him on this Friday morning, a note by special messenger. She wrote half a dozen in turn. Everything was impossible the moment it reached paper. Impossible to ask him simply to come, and to come quickly—that would mean, ‘I am ill, come with your professional air, take not my hand, my pulse.’ Ugh! Impossible to ask him to dine, impossible to send this summons forth under any poor little mask of mere civility—impossible, impossible each and every way.

And now it was five o’clock, and he was gone. London was stripped and bare.

On Saturday, her restlessness took her forth directly after luncheon. ‘I’ll go to the Park,’ she had said to Natalie, meaning what she said. But instead of going to the left when she got outside Claridge’s, she turned to the right and presently found herself walking up New Bond Street. Where it meets Oxford Street, she stood several seconds on the curb-stone, arrested by the thought: ‘Suppose someone is very ill, and he has stayed in town!’ Upon the mere supposition, London was full of eager life again, and of limitless possibility. Again the feeling: this is the heart of the world! Down yonder, only five or six minutes away, that house where he ‘lived alone.’ She crossed the road that Lord Peterborough said had seen the Roman eagles, and turned down the second street on the left. It was very short, and her goal was at the bottom. But she paused again. ‘Am I going to his house? But I’ve seen for long that I couldn’t do that. What should I say if I found him there? Nothing. Nothing.’ She turned sharply and sheered off to the left, into Henrietta Street. ‘And I will never meet him by a chance, since he almost never “goes out,” and then not to places I frequent.’

A sombre anger invaded her heart. ‘In spite of my boast to

Anton, shall I go on like this, letting I dare not wait upon I would, till I am old, and the Saga for me is ended? Are there other women in the world who walk these streets with just such histories in their hearts, carrying them about under commonplace exteriors, till they lay them to rest in their graves?' As she thought, she walked on. Suddenly she stopped again. But, of course! The thing to do was to go to Worcester House. It had begun to rain, but she called a hansom, and looking back as she got in—back towards the square she could not see, his square at the end of the street—she gave the cabman the new direction.

Her Grace was gone to the country. The Duke? He was at a Nursing Home, and saw no one. She turned away. How raw and grey the London street! The wind struck keen, but the rain had stopped. 'Drive,' she said to the cabman, 'drive towards Cavendish Square.'

Now they were passing the house. No trim brougham waiting for him to come out, opportunely. No, he was away. What was it like, his 'in the country'? Imagination gave no clue. When she had driven by this town-house of his—equal mystery, although she had been in it—she remembered she had not looked up at its windows. Indeed, now she thought of it, she had been too flustered to see it at all. She was shy of making the cabman drive round again, and, besides, the rain was over.

At Mortimer Street she dismissed the cab, and continued on foot round the Square. The moment she turned, at the north-west corner, she fixed her eyes on the house. 'Are you there? Are you there?' Her glance ran from window to window. No face. Now she was passing the door again. It struck her it was rather like Garth Vincent: close-shut, unyielding-looking, impenetrable, with iron about it, all grim and black save only the shining name. She went by, repeating the shining name. Since he's in the country, I'll go round once more, and then never again.

Who was the bronze man standing in the middle of the Square, between the leafless plane-tree and the holly hedge? She crossed to read the name upon the granite. 'I suppose *you* know him very well, William George Frederick Cavendish Bentinck. You see him flying in and out every day of your life. It's nothing to

you, William George Frederick Cavendish Bentinck——’ and she walked on, prolonging this last round childishly, pausing with pretence of interest to look up, as she passed, at the great mysterious house on the west. Two Houses of Mystery in one Square! This one surrounded by walls and guarded by spiked gates. She stared up at the single Cyclopean window in the very front of the high pediment, and felt it must have been upon such an afternoon as this, that the late Duke determined to dispense with the pretence of daylight. Was it true that he had burrowed underneath his palace, and honeycombed the earth with subterranean rooms and galleries, where he lived out his strange existence, mole-like, never seeing the light of day, and yet like some genie in an Eastern tale, living in a blaze of splendour: lights, lights, everywhere, day and night, in the gorgeous underground rooms, shining upon wonderful pictures, marbles, gold, and jewels—treasures without number and without name? And he never showed anyone his kingdom underground, and the world in revenge had called him mad. How it hates and fears mystery, the rough-and-ready old world! If you have anything you are not ready to advertise, you must be either criminal or mad. What’s the use of microscope and telescope, electric light, and the halfpenny press if a man presume to have a secret? Why, the very stars must have their pictures taken, and be interviewed. ‘Of course,’ Katharine smiled up at the oculus, dim, but vigilant, like an eye dull and old that yet sees more than many young and shining—‘of course the Duke was mad.’ A door banged in the direction of Vincent’s house. She looked quickly back over her shoulder. An old man had just come out, opened his umbrella, and walked quickly away. Why, yes, it was raining again. Just a little, slow and sullenly. Was there on earth a drearier place than London in December? What use to go round the dismal square again? None. One wanted a fire, a light, and a hole to creep into—just like the mad Duke! She stopped on the corner, looking up Wigmore Street. Cabs in the distance. She would wait till one came within hail. Suddenly she was very tired.

But she stood at the corner some minutes, feeling the chill and the wet penetrate the innermost heart of life. Well, here she was in London again! But the London that she had been

so happy in, was as dead as Pompeii. Peterborough House was shut and empty. Bertie was gone to the Riviera, so said the *Morning Post*. Anton was dismissed for ever. Even her father, lost to her. And kind old Lord Peterborough was hardly colder in his grave than Katharine standing there waiting for a hansom in the rain.

And this was what coming back to London meant. Who was the happier for her coming? Who cared? It did not help her at the moment to remember that nobody knew of her presence—that there were those who would fly at her call. The fact that she was alone, and convicted in her heart of a vain search for someone—these facts struck cold like the wet London wind. It was the feeling all women know who allow themselves, even temporarily, to break with the kindly ties of family and close friendship. She saw the littleness, the grim insignificance of the individual—things that our friends unconsciously help us to disguise from ourselves. Happily, or even busily surrounded, we forget that it is only by virtue of others that we properly exist at all. As well try to live without people, as play ball without wall or raquet for it to rebound from—or hands to keep it going. When we fly to books, it is again to people that we go—again we reach out for companionship, for those assurances without which we perish, assurances no man finds within himself, not the most philosophic nor the best.

Katharine hung those bitter moments suspended in the void. A hansom came crawling along. The driver's sou-wester and mackintosh cape gleamed in the grey wet. The woman standing on the curb-stone raised her hand. The cabman motioned 'All right,' but waited. A motor-car was rushing down the street. The man who drove it turned his head, the least bit in the world, and looked sharply at the figure standing at the corner.

'Is that you?' He swerved in towards the pavement, till his swollen wheel grazed the curb. With a buzzing and a vibrating the monster paused, panting and as if pleased to rest.

'Do you know anything about motors?' Vincent demanded.

'Yes; I learned something about them abroad. I've driven a Panhard.' She looked critically at the English-made machine, congratulating herself—How well I have myself in hand! 'What's this?'

'A new Napier.'

'What power?'

'Twenty-four. What are you doing out in the wet?' The rough question pleased her like a caress.

'I've just come up to town,' she answered irrelevantly— 'that is, I came last night. Don't you want to take me back to my hotel?' As he hesitated: '—or are you rushing to some patient?'

'I'm giving myself twenty minutes to try this machine.'

'I think I might ask *you* "what are you doing out in the wet?" It's a fine afternoon to try a motor.'

'I haven't got time to wait on the weather. Besides, the shower's over. Where's your hotel?' She told him.

'Well, get in.'

She took her seat at his side, with never a thought for the disappointed cabby scowling from over the way. She fixed her eyes on the fine brown hand that rested on the driving wheel, and gave herself up to a blind, unreasoning joy as the car scudded round the corner.

'You aren't dressed for motoring,' he said. 'Pull the rug over.'

'I'm not cold.' And it was true. The chill was gone out of the air. She did not even feel the occasional rain drop. She had a sense of being, on a sudden, wrapped in warmth. They flew on in silence. Glancing sideways, she saw the vigilant eyes narrowed. On the driving wheel lightly, firmly, lay the clever hands; the right falling every now and then on shining brake, or speed-lever, and resting there awhile.

'They aren't a bit like the rest of you,' she said involuntarily—'your hands aren't.'

'Why?' He shot as sharp a look down on them, as if he'd never in his life seen them before. 'What's the matter with them?' he demanded. 'Then, before she could answer: 'I know! They're damned cold!' With his left hand he felt in his pocket. That gloves were not forthcoming seemed not to surprise him, nor even to matter. Absorbed in his new toy, one hand or other always on the wheel, eyes measuring distance, brain calculating time.

She had laughed. 'That wasn't what I meant.' Still she

watched his hands. With deliberate intent to infuriate: 'They are like a woman's or an Italian's.'

'Oh! you find me effeminate, do you?' he grinned.

'Hardly that,' she admitted.

'You'd call me a woman's man, or a man's man?' he asked sardonically.

Stupidly she answered *au pied de la lettre*: 'Oh, a man's, of course,' thinking straightway after, 'What's called "a woman's man" is not a man for anyone.'

Now they were racing from Vere Street across Oxford Street. 'Which way are you going—not down Bond Street!'

'Why not?'

'Why, the traffic and the greasy wood pavement——'

But threading his way in and out among cabs, omnibuses, carriages, he turned sharply into crowded Bond Street, those same slim hands on brake or wheel or lever, guiding the car as surely, safely here, as they guided men and women through dangers more menacing than the quick disaster of a street collision.

There was Aubrey Church coming away from some picture show, no doubt, walking, as always, with down-bent head, his near-sighted eyes seeming to have given up the hope of seeing the world as it passed, and to look for compensation in the paving-stones. But now the press was closer, just above the point where Brook Street comes into Bond Street—and still they hardly slackened speed.

'That was neatly done,' said Katharine lightly, as by a hair they missed grazing a carriage suddenly drawn up.

'Ass!' ejaculated the driver of the motor. 'Even if the Prime Minister doesn't know his business, he ought to get a coachman who does!'

'Oh, was that Marlowe?'

'Yes. You aren't going to stay in town!'

'Why shouldn't I?'

'Because you aren't strong enough yet.'

'No,' she answered vaguely.

'Where are you going?'

'I don't know.' Then suddenly: 'I thought you were going to cure me.'

'I did the best I could.'

'No,' she said, with a sudden passion vibrating in the low voice.

'What?' The press was closer here, and still they hardly slackened pace.

As straight ahead as he, she looked, driving the car of her life. 'You only took me a certain way on the road' . . . she hesitated, caught her breath, glanced sideways, met his simultaneous swift scrutiny, and then, with the feeling one must have who jumps from the roof of a burning house, she said very low: 'Why don't you finish what you began?' Instead of making for the little court in front of Claridge's he turned the car sharply out of Brook Street into South Molton Street. Without looking at her, he said:

'What do you mean by that?'

'All that you can imagine I might.'

'Imagining isn't my business.'

Oh! would he spare her nothing? She clenched her hands together in her muff, and, 'Take me away,' she said.

'Where?'

'Wherever you will.'

'When?'

'Now.'

'I can't.'

'Why?'

'I've got a consultation.'

Good God! did he *never* forget his trade?

'I'm not going to the country till the last train,' he said.

'To-night?'

'Yes.'

'Well.'

He looked at her now. Her muscles stiffened as under an assault, but she sat quite silent, submitting herself with outward calm to the dire humiliation of refusal.

'Do you mean it?' he asked sharply.

'Yes, I mean it,' and her heart leapt up with a sudden wild hope. As he said nothing: 'Don't you believe me?'

'It isn't easy.' Another pause, and then, with rough bitterness: 'You hit me pretty hard once.'

'You need not be afraid now,' she said almost in a whisper. Straight on, without reply, he drove round to Brook Street again; in her heart the prayer: 'Oh, don't remember that I "hit you pretty hard once!"' But he is remembering. He will refuse. Quick! Let me think. We are almost there. I must get up to my room somehow . . . and then . . . well, it won't matter, of course, if I never come down again. Only I must get there, decently.' She began to long for that featureless hotel room as she had never longed for any haven but this man's breast. When I say good-bye, shall I be able to look at him without. . . . Dear God . . . how were these seconds just before her—how were they to be lived through? Should she find strength to stand up under his eyes? If not—if she fell . . . no . . . he would have to stay in that event, stay and look after her, and he would think . . . No! Whatever happened, she must bear this anguish steadfastly, till he was out of sight. Only a moment more. . . . If only the man hadn't such terrible eyes!

The car shot neatly into Claridge's narrow court. The liveried servant at the door set down the wicker wheel-guard, and was coming forward.

'Good-bye,' said Katharine, rising before the motor had actually stopped.

'I'll meet you at the station,' said Vincent.

'To go . . . where?' she said very low.

He looked suspiciously at her, as if she had asked him some too intimate question. Then he opened his coat, felt in a pocket, took out a letter addressed to himself—drew off the envelope, and handed it to her, saying: 'Victoria at ten.'

'Victoria at ten,' she heard someone replying. Was that her voice?

CHAPTER IV

LESS like one leaving a lover than like one escaping from an enemy, swiftly across the shallow step, through the two glass doors, past a servant and a couple of out-going guests, into the hall of Claridge's. Two or three groups of people, in the brilliantly-lit space, were quietly talking. Upon Katharine's quick entrance, a man sitting on the sofa opposite the door, in the shadow of a gigantic palm, jumped up and came towards her. She swerved a little on a blind impulse to evade.

'Patience is sometimes rewarded,' said a familiar voice. Her sense of nervous irritation at the intrusion of the irrelevant, was not allayed by seeing it was Bertie standing in her way, saying good-humouredly: 'I've been waiting a solid hour.'

'Have you?' Although he stood there in the full light now, she was barely conscious of him; or, rather, conscious of him merely as impediment, featureless, impersonal. She herself, like a passenger off a ship, who has made a voyage long and stormy, and on the solid earth yet feels the motion of the boat, Katharine was still speeding breathless against the wind across uncharted seas, on a journey of high peril, for which she needed eyes and ears and unencumbered heart. The man she had left at the door with those words so utterly commonplace, 'Victoria at ten' (for her charged with the significance of betrothal), the man she had left out there, with his curious faculty for taking the colour out of all other men, was so sharply vivid before the eye of the mind that this old friend confronting her actual eye—man of mere flesh and bone—was vague as half-forgotten dreams. Blindly she moved to the stair, on the impulse to shake off this faded memory that spoke with Bertie Amherst's voice, this pleasant ghost that had risen between her and that fierce reality

out yonder, as insistent as women find sacrifice, as glorious as men find war.

What was the pleasant ghost saying in the soft, unemphatic voice? Why did he keep beside her? She must hasten away and make ready—

‘Victoria at ten!’

Oh, Black-Magic Man! You must love me—love me!

‘What’s the matter, Kitty? You . . . Look here! you aren’t going to faint, are you?’ Bertie had taken hold of her arm and was drawing her to the sofa. Katharine sat down and covered her eyes with her hand. Now he was even vivider. That was how he would look at *‘Victoria at ten.’*

What was this the ghost beside her was saying? ‘You aren’t strong enough yet to be running about—all alone, too.’ And then very mercifully he sat silent for a little. Bertie had always an instinct for doing the proper, or at all events the soothing, the desired thing.

Presently: ‘Are you all right for a moment?’ She nodded, without taking her hand from her eyes.

Bertie jumped up and intercepted a servant, hurrying by with a card. Spoke to him as if confidentially, and emphasized his words with a clink of gold upon the tray where a card lay. Then loud enough for Katharine to hear: ‘Yes, please. Before you take that up! Will you?’

‘Yes, sir!’ The servant had turned about and run off in a different direction. Bertie was always civil to servants. She thought how Vincent would have spoken. He had no ‘Will you?’ let alone ‘Please,’ even for his equals. But disapproval knocked in vain at her full heart.

She let her hand drop from her eyes into her lap, and sat staring in front of her at vacancy. Vacancy? No! At pictures painted on the hours that would come after ‘ten o’clock at Victoria.’

Bertie had slipped quietly into the place at her side. ‘Why don’t you take off those heavy furs?’ He helped her. ‘Beast of a day. You aren’t going to stop here long such weather?’

‘N-no.’

‘When are you off again?’

'T-to-night—or very soon.'

Oh, Black-Magic Man, how is it with you when you care? As, silently, she opened the door to the question, fear crept in.

'As quick as all that!' Bertie said in a low, disappointed voice. 'Where are you going?'

She turned for the first time and looked at him. 'I thought you were on the Riviera.'

'What made you think that?'

'Oh, some paper said so.'

'Rum state of things when your knowledge of *my* movements is gleaned from the press! Don't you think so?'

She smiled faintly: 'I've been away, you see. So long out of things—I—I feel a good deal of a stranger.'

Why had Vincent not made her the least sign—since he was ready? Why had he allowed her (compelled her!) to say—what she had said? There had been cruelty in that. Cruelty of the actual moment, and the lasting cruelty of the memory that stabbed her now, and would again, again.

'Well, you won't feel a stranger long,' Bertie had said.

'I don't know. I've had a queer notion that it might last.'

'Take my word for it—it won't. By Jove, Kitty!'—he leaned towards her, not lover-like, not oppressive, just pleasantly smiling—'it's good to have you back.'

Again she turned her head. The vagueness that enveloped him dispersed a little. It was as if in the act of reading the bold black-letter of a parchment writing, absorbed by the wonder of the story, dazzled by jewelled picture and illuminated capital, the eye had suddenly been arrested by some older writing underneath, not quite obliterate. The older matter was nothing of importance, yet here and there a fragment of it caught the eye, held it an instant from the graver matter that overlaid the page.

'What did you say?' she asked.

'Only that it's good to have you back.'

'How did you find me?' she said with an obscure gratitude to him for trying, unrecognized effect of her forlornness of an hour ago when she had stood alone in the rain, waiting.

'I ran across Craybourne at the club. He asked where you were. I didn't know.'

The brisk servant put a small table in front of Katharine, and set down the cognac tray.

'Thank you,' said Bertie. 'That's all right.'

'Much obliged, sir.'

'You've treated me brutally,' but he said it quite cheerfully as he poured out the liquid amber.

'Oh no. I haven't been brutal.' She set her lips to the tiny glass and took the scorch of the liquor on her tongue.

'Yes, you have. No. Please drink it all,' he prayed her. She smiled to herself: Vincent would have said . . . Suddenly she saw him side by side with this man on the sofa—not nearly so dim now, the man on the sofa. The war and the wound, and absence, seemed to have left him the same attractive creature. Well groomed and spick-and-span, and yet with an air of negligence, that made you feel his immaculate freshness achieved without pains, unsought, inevitable, a grace of nature, like his fine tanned skin and his clear boyish eyes—eyes with nothing behind them? Well, there might even be a certain comfort in that. Nothing to crack one's wits with wondering. Oh, Black-Magic Man, what secrets fierce or tender behind *your* eyes?

'Danby came into the club,' Bertie was saying, 'while Phil and I were talking. He said he'd seen you in a hansom—at least, he thought it was you—coming out of Claridge's. But you looked clean through him as if he'd been air, and he hardly thought you'd cut an old friend like that.'

'Oh no. I didn't notice——'

'You were thinking of something else.'

'Yes, I must have been.'

'Or someone.' He studied her.

'Bertie——' she began nervously.

'Yes.'

'Nothing. I must go upstairs now.'

'What are you going to do to-night?'

'To-night? Why? What are *you* going to do?'

'Take you to see the new French dancer at the Alhambra.'

'Bertie, you can't so soon after——'

'Oh, lots of people do. And I've got a box. No one would see you. I've asked the Hudsons, and we'll sup at the Savoy—private room.'

'I can't,' she said quickly; 'didn't I tell you I wasn't going to stay in London?'

'But you can't get back to Ventnor to-night—look at the time!' Katharine did so with a stringing up of nerves. 'Stupid of me to think of dragging you out to supper—but there's no reason we shouldn't dine quietly together, and I'll leave you to go to bed early.'

She shook her head. Dining with Bertie took time. Katharine's dinner would be short to-night—more like what she felt must commonly be Vincent's own. A vision of him at the head of the dinner-table—that gruesome table in the Cavendish Square dining-room, that sick folk gathered round each day. She saw herself sitting there opposite Garth Vincent. And for her life she couldn't see white damask, nor glass, nor silver, only a dingy brown cloth, thumbled papers, and tattered books. Instead of the roses that she loved, those wiry bits of ivy, and a few aged anemones drooping dejected. Inwardly she smiled at herself, and shook the vision off. Where she was there would be roses. But while Bertie's pleasant voice went on—he had made her sit down again in the shadowed corner by the palm—she felt herself pursued by realization of things at Cavendish Square, or elsewhere with Garth Vincent, that she would find harder to change than the flowers at his sombre board.

Bertie had asked her something. What was it? To cover her inattention: 'If you aren't going to the Riviera, as the papers say, what shall you do?'

'I am going, as a matter of fact, to take the yacht to Palermo; at least'—he looked at her—'I was going to in a fortnight or so.'

How well she knew what the long golden days on the blue water would be like! And while Bertie and his friends, who were her friends too, were doing all these familiar, pleasant things, what would she be doing? 'And till then, London?' she asked.

'Well, I did promise Crutchley I'd hunt ten days or so in Leicestershire first.'

She could see Bertie as vividly in Leicestershire as she saw him on the yacht, and she recovered a vague wonder as to what a London specialist could find to do in the country.

Well, she was going to discover.

'Victoria at ten!'

‘So that’s it,’ she said aloud, ‘Hunting in Leicestershire till you go to Sicily—— I could find it in my heart to envy the Southern part of your programme——’ and thought flew on to the hours that she meanwhile would be living through, in mid-winter England. Not one of them all could she forecast. As she groped in the impenetrable dark, she turned her eyes to the face beside her, with a sudden sense of comfort in its openness—even in its lack of hidden possibilities. No rude surprises out of Bertie. With such frank aids as he gave you towards making computation of what you had to expect, you would find yourself in the position of the undeveloped races. You could not count far, perhaps, but you could count securely. It was like saying 1, 2, 3, upon the fingers.

He saw that she had not even listened to his urging that she should share that part of his programme she admitted she almost envied. ‘As I say, I had thought of going to Leicestershire; but on reflection I think Brook Street will do me. If you don’t feel up to anything to-night, when shall I come to-morrow?’

‘To-morrow?’

‘Yes, to-morrow.’ Patiently he sat there waiting for her answer.

To-morrow! what would the world look like to-morrow? For Katharine Dereham all the populations of all the cities of the earth would be narrowed down to a single man. To-morrow she would find herself cast away on a desert island with this One. The One who had made her—say what she had said. He had not helped, nor ever so little screened her. Had left her from the first to struggle quite alone in the coils of the dragon. Her hand went up to her throat like one who fights for breath. Love could be like that it seemed—a Monster that came up from the roots of the world, out of the deeps of the sea; a thing sired by Storm and mothered by the Dark, that seized hold of the puny creatures of the earth, and in spite of barriers, in spite of all high words and cleanness of the heart—this Monster of Mystery, Ancient of Days, this Love, could coil about its victims till their strength was spent.

Was not all the song and story of the Past a mere retelling of this conflict? In its poor little trumpery modern guise, she was fighting the same fight that Phædra fought, and Brynn-

hilde, and all the pale and sad-eyed sisterhood, who long ago had shown the world that a great passion is a great calamity. 'But I, a poor and puny modern, what have I to do with these terrible and elemental things? They are as out of place in my life, as a peplum would be on my shoulders, or sandals on my feet, here in this commonplace Claridge's.' The modern had exploded 'magic,' and character was Fate.

She dropped the hand that had caught at the close string of pearls at her neck—and sitting erect, with eyes out of which the vague fear was vanishing, heard the iteration at her side, 'What time to-morrow?'

'I'll let you know, Bertie.'

'No, I want you to tell me now. It isn't much to ask?'

'I . . . I can't possibly say—any more now.' She stood up. 'I think I told you I might have to go away at once.' (A long way off now, that voice: 'Victoria at ten.') 'Good-bye.' She held out her hand. As he took it, warmly yet without undue pressure, she suddenly tightened her own hold—found herself clinging to this hand so unexpectedly, a little half-hour ago, held out.

'Bertie, what are you doing to-night?'

'Why, I told you—going to——' He looked at her hard. 'No I'm not either! I'm coming back here after dinner.'

'You mustn't do that,' she said quickly.

Bertie wavered a moment, but his manners saved him, as they have many another at a moment when thought is obscured. 'Of course I won't come, if you don't want me.'

'No, not to-night,' she said.

'I'll tell you what I'll do! I'll be at Peterborough House, in the library! I've had a telephone put in. Enough to make my uncle turn in his grave. It sits flaunting there at the side of his old writing-table. I'll be near it all the evening.'

'I can't have you give up your party——'

'I'll get Danby to take it off my hands. That'll please everybody!'

'Bertie, you're very good.'

'Oh, I'm lots of things, but good isn't one of 'em.'

'No, I shall not need to telephone,' she said with an air of finality,

'Probably not, but I shall be there all the same. From after dinner till midnight, within two feet of—your voice.'

'Good-bye.'

But he kept beside her to the lift. 'I'm going on to the Brutons'. Shall I say you're here?'

'Was the paper wrong about them, too? I thought they were in Egypt.'

'They were. One of the children got ill. They raced back.' He was writing something on a card.

'What is that?'

'My telephone number.'

She took it. 'No, don't tell the Brutons just yet.'

'All right.' He lifted his shining hat, and appeared to be sinking downward from Katharine's own level like the traditional angel descending out of Paradise, cleaving his way through space without effort or discomposure, his two feet side by side. But it was not Bertie who shot down—Katharine going up in the swift-flying lift.

* * * * *

'How long does it take to get from here to Victoria?' she asked the servant who brought the coffee after dinner.

'About fifteen minutes.'

She looked at the clock. Not yet nine.

At a quarter past she went suddenly into her bedroom. 'Natalie!' The maid was not there. Katharine found a hat and pinned it on her head. Unlocked her fitted travelling bag, stared at it, and locked it again. Caught up her gloves and ran downstairs, not waiting for the lift. 'The telephone is over there,' she said to herself. Aloud, to the man in livery near the door: 'A hansom, please.'

* * * * *

He was waiting for her on the platform.

But with no air of expectancy. The casual observer would have said the gentleman under the lamp was waiting—yes, for his train—and killing time by reading the late edition of the *Westminster Gazette*. But Katharine caught the sharp look thrown out between the top of the paper and the fringe of the half-dropped eyelid. He did not know her on the instant through her figured veil.

She went rapidly towards him, and saw the moment when he recognised her. No gladness in the look, almost a slackening of taxed attention—an effect of ‘Oh, there you are, are you?’

‘I have come only to tell you——’ She was out of breath, almost out of voice.

‘Wait a moment,’ he interrupted, folding up the paper and thrusting it into his pocket in the act of turning away.

‘I only wanted to say——’

He had his watch out. ‘You can talk in the train.’ And now he was going back along the platform.

She followed him a few steps breathlessly. ‘I’m here only because I promised——’

‘Yes, yes’—he smiled over his shoulder with a grimness that summoned all her womanhood to arms.

‘Just to make my word good—to clear it of caprice and to tell you——’

‘I’ll get your ticket.’

‘I don’t want a ticket—I——’

He was gone.

She stood an instant looking after him; then with swift steps followed on again in the same direction—hesitated the fraction of a moment at the entrance of the booking-office, turned, and disappeared under a black board on which white letters advertised: WAY OUT.

As the clock hand pointed to ten minutes past ten, in one of the little telephone cabinets off the hall at Claridge’s, a white-faced woman was standing, receiver at ear.

‘Are you there, Bertie?’

‘Yes.’

‘A—is everything just as it used to be?’

‘Absolutely the same.’

‘Of course I mean the library?’

‘It’s all just the same—except that I’ve established communication with you.’

‘Good-night.’

‘Good-night.’

CHAPTER V

FOR three days Katharine shut herself up in the hotel. Bertie called every afternoon, and was each time told, 'Miss Dereham is unable to see anyone.' On the fourth day he was met by the news that Miss Dereham was gone.

'Gone where?' She had left no address.

It was out of sheer formless dread of Vincent that Katharine left the hotel where he knew she was. Not that she could seriously think he would come here for her—and yet, there he stood at every turn, by the door, in the lobby, on the stair, with his face of menace, or with that derisive smile, even now a vision to shake the heart. She reasoned with herself in vain. Called it nerves, denied it was the all-imperative call of that mysterious election in the blood that cries out day and night, 'My own, my own, give to me my own.'

How long would it be like this? Was London to be impossible to her forever, for dread of one man's eyes? Would the hour never come when she could meet them steadfastly?

On the evening of the day that Bertie was told she had gone from the hotel without leaving her address, he found her at the Brutons'. Yes, she was going to stay with Blanche a few days, till she could make more definite plans.

'What has happened?' he said.

'Happened?'

'Yes. You look—as if you'd seen a ghost.'

'Perhaps I have.'

'Well, look at me.'

She smiled: 'Do you think the sight of you will set the ghosts to flight?'

'Rather. I say, Kitty——' She interrupted him, speaking quite slowly and with those eyes that had seen a ghost fixed upon him:

'I almost think that, of the men who've said they love me, you——'

'Yes?'

'You've *liked* me best. I'm very grateful to you for that.'

'Liked you! Is that a reflection on the way I've made love?'

'No. It's only to say you've been blessedly quiet about it all—yet you've always given me a feeling that you *liked* me.'

'It don't somehow sound the right sort of raging——' She smiled, a light of kindness in her face. 'Look here, Kitty. I *could* rage—more or less—if that's what you want.'

'My dear Bertie, that you don't, never have raged, makes me—makes me——'

He waited, and then with sudden misgiving: 'Are you going to marry Waldenstein after all?' he demanded.

'No.'

'I know he asked you, not three weeks ago. I saw him the day he went to Torquay—and I saw him after he got back. I was even a little sorry for him. Are *you* a little sorry—that you said no? Is that it?'

'No. That's not it.'

'Would you say "no" again?' She nodded wearily. 'Then you'll marry me.'

'I shall never marry anybody.'

'That's absurd. You aren't the kind to live alone.'

'It may be that that makes me feel——'

'What?'

'The need of a friend. I want a friend most terribly.'

'Well, I'm here.' If he had taken her hand, or made any of the customary demonstrations, that would have been the end. He sat quite still.

'But——' She stopped.

'Well?'

'I meant only what I said. *A friend.*'

'I understand.'

'No, you don't. I want to be honest with you. At least, while I don't want to tell you everything, I want——'

'You needn't tell me a mortal thing. I'd rather make you forget. Come to Sicily. We'll make up a party if you like—though I shall hate the rest. It's the kind of thing the Brutons would like, if they aren't afraid to leave that boy of theirs.'

'They might bring Freddy along. It would do him good.'

'Kitty! You mean to come! But what's the use of worrying with a party?'

'Ah, I knew you wouldn't be content to have me as a friend.'

'Try me.'

'How long could you be content so?'

'As long as—those were your terms.'

'You think, perhaps, I shall change. You are building on that.'

'No, I almost wish I were.'

'It would be a great pity for you——'

'The only thing that would be a pity would be that I should go alone!'

'Bertie, something has happened that makes me shrink from—gives me a great horror of—— One side of life is spoiled for me, spoiled utterly.'

'Poor Kitty!'

She looked at the incarnate kindness sitting there, till a rush of tears dimmed it.

'Friendship,' she said—'friendship is a very noble thing.'

'Yes,' agreed Bertie, and she smiled, but the flicker went out upon his adding: 'There's only one thing better.'

'Oh, Bertie—go away and find the one thing better.'

'I shall never find it away from you.'

'You will never find it with me.'

'Then I shall not find it.'

'That is the face he took into battle,' she thought. But for herself, a sense of warmth and safety wrapped her round, with this coming close again of the old familiar life. When memory stabbed at her, she would shrink and say to herself half-piteously, like one before a court of justice, making out her case: 'Yes, I don't deny I thought and said all those terrible, appalling things, but it was part of my illness. I am nearly well now. I am another creature.' Yet in her happiest moods, recollection of Vincent would strike her laughter silent, and set her nerves to

twanging harshly. The terror of meeting him did not lessen. What should she do if she did meet him? She would not pay visits in Portland Place, because it meant going by Cavendish Square. She would not go to Worcester House for fear Vincent might be still in attendance upon the Duke—might meet her at the door or on the stair.

It was her first acquaintance with terror. No one so well as Bertie helped to exorcise the demon—and though he was far enough from guessing at the source of his new acceptableness, he availed himself of it, in his pleasant smiling way, from morning till midnight. When Katharine felt tempted to draw back from him, the thought of that possible encounter with Vincent was all-sufficient to serve Bertie's cause.

He saw his affairs in so hopeful a light that he accepted with patience the brief postponement necessitated by Katharine's going to pay her little yearly visit to Madame de Courcelles. She was to cross that night, in spite of the storm that had come in with the dawn, and increased as the day wore on.

'I don't mind the wind and the rain,' Katharine said as they stood about the fire drinking coffee after luncheon—'I only mind leaving Blanche in the midst of this new anxiety about Freddy.'

'Oh, I'm not anxious any more,' said Mrs. Bruton, cheerfully, 'I've got Moore to call in Dr. Vincent. There's Moore now!' she said, glancing through the open door at a middle-aged man, who could be seen slowly and pompously wending his way upstairs. Mrs. Bruton set down her coffee cup, excused herself, and hastened after the family adviser. Katharine stood quite still, by the far end of the mantelpiece facing the door. 'Shut it! shut the door, Blanche!' she prayed inwardly. But the door stood wide.

The Chiltern girls who had been lunching, talked on. Bertie was in first-rate spirits, despite the impending journey. They chattered and laughed. Katharine stood asking silently why she did not pull herself together, and go and close the door. Wheels outside. Something stopped. She turned her head. All she could see through the window was about two feet of a whip, but she felt the sting of it like a lash across her face. Fascinated she watched the end trembling—was his hand on it? What if it were? Her heart was not hanging on that string, though she

did have the distinct sensation that, invisible, it dangled out there in the cold and wet, shivering, at the end of his whip.

A peal at the bell, a sharp attack upon the knocker. Still there was time to shut the door, and still she stood there. The top of a black head moved quickly up between the pillars of the banister; the white of gleaming eyes intensified by the pupils' scintillant black, that flung a passing look into the drawing-room. He never slackened that pace of his that was half a run. But as he mounted the second stair, he turned his head and across the balustrade met Katharine's eyes. No mark of recognition, no change in the set face, save that the shining eyes were suddenly suffused, the pupils not dimmed, but the white turned red. And now he was gone.

'Why, Kitty,' Gladys Chiltern said, 'wasn't that your doctor?'
'Yes.'

'And doesn't he even say "How do you do?" to you?'

Bertie looked round. 'Oh, was that Vincent? I must say it's ungrateful of you, Kitty, not to have gone and spoken to him.'

'I know other people he's cured, who can't stand him either,' said Gladys. 'Now, I think *I'd* rather like him. Make him come in as he goes down. I want to look at the creature.'

'Why,' said Bertie, jumping up from his armchair by the fire, 'you're shivering, Kitty. It is too cold with that door open.'

'Yes, shut it,' said Katharine.

'No, no,' objected Gladys. 'I want to see him as he comes down.'

But Bertie had obeyed Katharine. As the others talked on, she sat and listened for footsteps, and had not long to wait. 'Now!' she admonished herself, 'if I am a rational being I'll break this spell, I'll get up, go out and speak to him—tell him about Bertie.'

The group round the fire, in the midst of a laughing discussion, hardly noticed as Katharine rose quietly and crossed the room. She reached the door, opened it a little. He was coming downstairs, the anxious mother at his heels. Katharine was sure that she was going out to speak to him. But the impulse seemed not so much to weaken, as to be impossible to obey. Her hand on the knob, lamed; her feet so near the threshold smitten with paralysis. He was saying 'no immediate danger.' But would he

come again to-morrow, Mrs. Bruton begged. 'Not necessary.' 'Yes, yes, it would make such a difference, if you would come.' A fraction of an instant he seemed to hesitate—looked over the banister again, as he had done in going up, saw the drawing-room door ajar, and let his gleaming eyes fall upon the face that looked out at him. Katharine tried to take her fingers from the knob, tried to go forth and tell him what she had not yet told Bertie—that she was going to marry Mr. Amherst. She must herself tell that to Vincent. Only so would the dark influence be exorcised, and the future safe. And instead of going out upon the errand, there she stood—feeling pitifully what sadness lay underneath the harshness of that face, and again as before, how the riddle of the painful earth seemed written there.

Blanche, bending towards him, with her hand on the banisters, urged his coming back 'to-morrow.' 'Impossible before Monday,' he said abruptly, and over Mrs. Bruton's head again he dropped that look on Katharine, that held her as Arctic iron holds and burns bare flesh. To draw away, is to wrench and tear the living tissues. The only safety lies in submission to the searing contact. She bent her head—less like one saying, 'How do you do?' than like one saying simply 'Yes.'

Still Mrs. Bruton's anxious voice ventured to hope that 'to-morrow'—he hurried down the stair. Out of his refusal three words—'*the country to-night*'—came like a command as he passed the door that stood ajar—the face no longer there. Gladys's derisive laughter had made Katharine turn.

'You're afraid of him,' the girl announced gleefully.

'He is talking to Blanche about Freddy.' Katharine came back to the fire. She lifted her eyes, and again through the window saw the whip lash tremble, fly into the air, describe a wild fantastic curve, and disappear in the grey wet of the windy December afternoon. Something of herself was surely dangling on the lash.

* * * * *

She bade Bertie good-bye after tea. No, she preferred it like that. She hated to be 'seen off.' It was an inane custom.

She would not even allow Wilfred Bruton to come to the station. Blanche needed him. Natalie was an experienced if unenthusiastic traveller.

It afforded that person no small astonishment, however, to find herself steaming out of Victoria Station on the eight o'clock train, while Miss Katharine stood beside her dressing-bag and jewel-case out there on the platform, asking the way to the telegraph-office. Miss Katharine had changed her mind while she was getting out of the cab. Well, to be sure, how she did care for that poor little sick Freddy! Or was it sympathy for his mother's anxiety? Natalie, at all events, had got at last the long-delayed permission to go for a visit to her own people.

* * * * *

For an hour and three-quarters Katharine sat in the dismal station, scrutinizing by turn wet travellers, and the face of a small watch, or in the quiet times after train departures, still sat there with body slightly forward-bent over clasped hands, staring down in front of her at the track left by muddy feet and the trail of dripping umbrellas,—studied these signs with an air of fixity befitting some Champollion deciphering an obscure inscription. Looking back afterwards, she had no clear recollection of writing the note to Bertie, or the telegram to Madame de Courcelles, yet she sat there with both note and telegram crushed together in her hand.

* * * * *

He never even paused when he caught sight of her. She knew he had seen that she sat there. She found herself behind him at the gate.

'Tell the man to let me through,' she said. He turned and shot a look at her over his shoulder. They stood so, arraigning each other.

'Pass on, please,' said the ticket-inspector.

'It's all right,' muttered Vincent hurriedly, as though the words were surprised out of him. Katharine was allowed to pass. She walked beside him, waiting for him to speak. No word.

'You minded—you minded it that I didn't come before.'

'Minded?'

'Yes, I saw that in your face to-day.'

'Humph! You read faces as well as hands?'

It struck her miserably, as they walked on, that this time he made no move to get her a ticket. Oh no, he had tried that before. Even that first time, he had waited to get it till she was

actually here. Had he, even before she failed him, felt obscurely (as it might have been herself) that to make too sure, to stand ticket in hand, were to tempt the Fates—were to give the mocking weavers of destiny yet one chance more to turn the pattern to grotesquerie? A new wretchedness fell upon her as she felt what it had been, to just this man, to start upon his journey with a superfluous fare in his pocket. 'Less my absence,' she told herself humbly, 'than the presence of the ticket, unclaimed, derisive. 'You hit me pretty hard once.' Twice? She stole a sideways glance. Not a third time, if caution could safeguard a man. She stopped suddenly.

'Is there time before the train goes to send this wire?' she asked, holding out the message to Auteuil. He paused, not taking the paper:

'The train to where?'

She shrank. '——hit me pretty hard once,' she repeated to herself—maybe twice, certainly no third time. Vividly before her eyes, that envelope he had given her in the motor.

'To High Winston,' she said.

His answer was to draw out his watch.

'And this letter, please——'

He took the two, half turned, and then looked back with a sudden rather sinister smile.

'No, no,' she went nearer—'don't——' He turned his head so resolutely away she laid her hand on his arm. 'You are not to remember—you must know there is—for me—no turning back, now.'

She stood and watched him going down the platform.

The friendly porter appeared with her bag.

'Is this your train? Where shall I label——'

She repeated the name of the place.

The man found her a corner seat, put the small things in, and went away for the others. Katharine kept her jewel-case in her hand, and stood on the platform by the open door. Suppose he doesn't come back!

The rebound from that fear was so great that, as far off down there, near the gate, he detached himself from the gloom and came towards her, she felt like a creature rescued.

The reaction from those few seconds' doubt, came in the guise

of a reassurance so warm and fear-allaying, that a strange sensation mastered her, of its being an old custom for her thus to stand at week ends, waiting for him to join her in the train. Not a clandestine creature in a veil—she felt underneath her excitement a sense of the naturalness, the fitness of it all, as if she were his wife, had been his wife for years.

‘Only half a minute to spare,’ he said, holding the door for her. She got in and sat down. Vincent still stood on the platform. What was he waiting for? she wondered impatiently. Oh, he had sent for a foot-warmer; the man was coming with it.

A passenger hurrying by, stopped and spoke. Vincent greeted him as an acquaintance. Although he stood with his face towards Vincent and away from the carriage, Katharine shrank back in her corner. All the fancied ‘naturalness’ of the situation fled out of it. It was very new for Katharine Dereham to feel awkward, shamefaced, at unavoidable disadvantage—*afraid*; and she suddenly felt all these things. The hot-water tank was pushed in. The porter was closing the door, shutting Vincent out. Katharine lifted a sudden staying hand, and her anxious eye caught Vincent’s. He smiled; a little wickedly, but, Saints in Heaven! what a light it made—his smiling!

At the last moment he entered the carriage, his bluff, middle-aged friend following hard upon his heels, talking about the projected change in the time-table. It was plain he had not seen Vincent’s smile, had no notion but what he was alone.

What will he do? What *do* men do under such conditions? She remembered Hilda Carey and Oscar Warburton. That *she*, Katharine Dereham, should come to play poor Hilda’s part in the ugly little comedy. A story of Bourget’s came back to her—all sorts of ‘shady’ escapades, out of fiction and out of life, chased one another through her head. Will he pretend we are strangers?—and she felt her gorge rise at the prospect of the cheap deceit. Swiftly foresaw, too, the difficulty at the other end. It was so late, there were few passengers. No hope of being lost in a crowd. And the bluff acquaintance would not miss any detail in the vulgar subterfuge by which, hanging about, lurking behind luggage, or at the station corner, she should at last perforce be claimed and carried off—close upon the midnight hour!

While she was being ground under these prognostications,

Vincent had turned to her and said quite simply: 'Can we have the window open that much?'

'Yes,' she answered. The acquaintance stared. But Vincent, still talking time-table, pushed the hot-water tank under Katharine's feet. 'Thank you,' she said, feeling suddenly that he could be trusted, even here, and again that it was 'natural' to have him looking after her. The talk between the two men was now about a horse sale; Vincent asked especially about a certain mare. He prompted his horsey friend upon some question of pedigree, and the argument waxed hot. Katharine's thoughts left the two men and went whirling on before, wheeling giddily like flocks of frightened birds, now darting back upon the past, and then on—on to what lay before.

Still the talk of horses went forward without a pause, the bluff man doing the major part, the other listening, dissenting, correcting, throwing in one word to the other's twenty, but by that one steering the course of the score. For some moments from under her veil, Katharine kept covert watch upon the dark, ungentle face. 'Oh, I love you—I love you,' she said in her heart. Then, turning to meet the wind that rushed in at the window: 'Does he—shall I make him love me? Shall I?'

The train had stopped several times—but no one had got in. Now as they went on again Katharine made a visor with her hands, shielding her eyes from the ceiling lamp, and looking out upon the countryside. The air smelt of wet earth, of sodden dead leaves, of dripping woodland. But nothing here, away from station lights, nothing could be plainly seen. A gale of wind was sweeping the black moonless world. It seemed to be the wind and not the train that was carrying her away.

Vincent, still talking or listening to his friend, was making the window fast in spite of her: 'I don't feel cold.'

'It's too much,' and the sash was pulled up tight.

As he turned his head to answer something his friend had said, it occurred to Katharine that he was treating her as Germans treat their wives, as though in the rational councils of the lords of the universe, women naturally had neither art nor part—not only needed not to be appealed to, needed not even to be remembered—unless they seemed likely to catch cold, or do something else of a silly and purely feminine character. And she smiled under

her veil, not ill-pleased at either his care or his neglect. It indulged her fancy that the situation was that of plain and simple folk long wed.

She glanced down at the skirt of her brown cloth gown, muddied by the hansom wheel. What would it be like, trying to get on without a maid? Should she find some one 'down there'? Whether she did or not, her instinct had been right; it was not possible to face the idea of bringing even a devoted servant out of the old life to be witness of the new. There must be no eyes. And this not for the sake of those conventions she was leaving behind; still less for prudence' sake. A question of nerves. No eyes had ever had the right to look at Katharine Dereham as they might to-night—and from this hour, on. But just now, no eyes. Not that she was actually afraid now, or even doubtful. But she had intensely that sense of isolation, that comes of a resolve to act in blind obedience to some inner call, whose voice no other will ever fully understand, and few even faintly hear. And so: no eyes, no ears. She glanced across the carriage, encountered Vincent's level look, and turned again to the dark square of the window. There would be his ears to hear—his merciless eyes to meet. She would need all her courage to face that light, unflinching.

Natalie, a good deal taken aback at her mistress's sudden determination—Natalie, not over-pleased, will have a rough crossing, thought her mistress; adding with conscious grimness: 'And I, too, I'm likely to have a rough crossing.'

Now they were stopping again. The horsey man raised his voice—he raised his hand, too, and laid it on the window-strap before the train pulled up. He was evidently getting out here—and still the same theme.

The wind rushed in, and the man, alighting, held fast to his hat. Vincent did the same while he shut the door, saying through the window: '*That* mare for sale? Send her over to-morrow morning. I'll have a look at her.'

'All right. Good-night.' The horsey man was gone.

'Only one more station,' Vincent said. He pulled up the sash again and leaned back, stretching out his hands upon his knees. He glanced down at them reflectively, and suddenly laughed. 'So you read hands! Can you read your own?'

He was still looking at his, with something of the same attentiveness he had shown in the motor. Two hours before she had drawn off her glove to write the note to Bertie. Her bare right hand lay now upon her muff. Jewels flashed and signalled for admiration. But Vincent seemed as little to see the winking jewels as the hand upon the muff. He was holding both his own palms up to Katharine with: 'Now I'd like to hear what's queer about them.'

He offered them to her as if he expected her to take them, palmist fashion. She made a little motion to do so, and then checked herself. She no more dared to touch him than if he had been flame. And he was still holding up his hands, and almost boyishly, 'Tell me what's queer about them,' he said.

'They're not like the rest of you.'

'How do you make that out?'

'Why, because you—you—the rest of you,' she indicated faintly with her ungloved hand the bold hard face bending near, the square of shoulder, in general the strong and well-knit frame. But as he still sat there, holding up his hands and looking from them to her—'because the rest of you is very masculine and your hands are . . . as I've said.'

'Are what?'

'Why, not like English hands at all.'

'I don't see that,' he said sharply, like one rebutting a damaging accusation.

'Well, you look at other people's. There are more ugly hands in England than in any country in the world. And besides, yours are sensitive hands.'

'Where do you find that?' he said, grinning.

She must justify herself, and not let him think she was merely flattering him. 'Look at the finger-tips.'

He obeyed with a sudden comical gravity, but seemed to derive less satisfaction than he had anticipated.

'Turn them over.' She laid her muff down on the seat beside her, and bent forward a little. 'Lay them down so,' she illustrated. An instant's tingling ran through her, as she saw he might think she meant him to lay them in her lap. 'Here,' she said hurriedly, 'here is your paper.' She laid it across his knees. 'Now don't you see?' She bent further over.

'Look at the line down the side. No—here, from little finger to wrist. How good the curve is——'

'Oh, good is it?'

'—— and how slim the wrist is——' With her forefinger she had indicated the curve, following the line described only a quarter of an inch from his hand, following it slowly from little finger-tip down to wrist, to where the short black hair came out from the white cuff—and suddenly it was as if, after all, she had touched him. She drew back and leaned her head against the cushioned wall. While he still sat an instant frowning at his palm-down hands, she said to herself: 'The kind of lean hands to do Black Magic—healing to the verge of the miraculous if he will, but hinting at other powers as well'—powers to which she refused to give a name.

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The lasting impression of the arrival at High Winston, was a thing compounded of black night and moaning wind. Great trees tossed about an old house. The ghost of a light flitted from window to window, and halted at last in the hall. Katharine remembered with shrinking the one question she had put at the end of the journey: What about the servants?

'What servants?'

'Yours.'

'Well? They're *my* servants. I'm not theirs.'

In lieu of welcome, they were set upon by dogs. Vincent cursed them, and then forgot his human companion in pleased acceptance of canine apologies.

An old woman with a lamp, murmuring through Vincent's 'Where's Jackson?' that her son had gone down to prevent more damage being done by the high wind to the unfinished stable; and how he had expected to be back, but thought 'no matter what' the master would expect him to look after the new stables. While Katharine digested her grim adventure under the aspect of 'no matter what,' Vincent was inquiring into the supposed damage, with an absorbed solicitude he had never betrayed in finding out the havoc wrought by disease upon the human frame.

Firing off quick questions, he had divested himself of his coat. Katharine stood in hers. The dogs still barked at her, between their master's threats, and in intervals of leaping round him

trying to lick his face. A gust of wind blew open a door in some region beyond. The old woman went to shut it, still muttering about the storm. Vincent was putting on his coat again. Katharine looked at the dark face for a sign. A sign, man! A sign!

He spoke to the dogs.

On an impulse Katharine moved back to the front door, which, left ajar, the wind had blown half open. She peered out. The hand of the storm caught at her silk scarf, and seemed to draw her into the dark. The thought of flight contended with the tears in her throat. One step over the sill, and the spell would be broken. Now she was crossing the dim threshold—plucked at, welcomed by the many fingers of the rejoicing winds. In the same instant from out the shadowy house, an ungentle hand had fallen on her shoulder. His voice:

‘You’re going the wrong way.’

She caught her breath in a sob. ‘Oh, Black-Magic Man, how am I to know?’

He crushed her suddenly against him, his lips were on her mouth.

So, silently, he answered her.

She drew away with a sense of terrified gladness, and steadied herself against the door, not daring in that first dizzy moment to lift her eyes. Dark as it was, she might see too much. Trembling still, she yielded to the hand that drew her back into his house.

The old woman was there again like a Fate, looking on, impassive.

‘Take Mrs. Vincent upstairs,’ he said, and Katharine felt the oddity of her own swift relief, her gratitude for the shelter of a name.

‘I’ll see Jackson,’ he threw over his shoulder, and slammed the door behind him.

CHAPTER VI

DURING the long silent drive from the station through the windy dark she had said to herself: 'What sort of life does he lead here?' Imagination was as unlit as the night. She had seen this man at work—'What will he be like at play?' She knew instinctively that good work confers dignity, but that play borrows its qualities from the player. She had not known how men worked before; she had learned that with an odd kind of reverence from Vincent. But she knew how men played, men who made a profession of it, and she shrank half unconsciously from seeing this man, whose youth had been spent, as she vaguely gathered, in vagabonding about the world among the hardier sort of adventurers, who had late awaked to love of science, and had won his extraordinary place, not as others said by sheer force of genius, but, as he said, 'because I worked like hell——' how was this man going to play his part in that pretty modern tournament, English country life?

She need not have troubled herself. He did not play. He went about his property with the same black-browed earnestness that he carried in town from patient to patient, from lecture-room to laboratory. And with the same success, wrought in the same way, out of love for what he was doing. Wherever he had gathered up such lore, he knew soils and crops and cattle, as he knew men and their weakness. To see him among his horses was to feel he understood them better than did the grooms, who understood nothing else. He had the land-hunger of the founders of the great estates. Ever since she could remember Katharine and her father had been selling land. Lord Peterborough from different motives had got rid of thousands of acres. But Vincent, whenever a neighbouring farm came into the market, added it to his possessions—not merely to have it, not merely to carry it

on in the old way, but to improve, to exemplify his favourite theory that farming was not only good fun, 'it could be made to pay. Katharine credited the pay at once, since he said so, but she was sceptical about the fun.

'When you work so hard at your profession all the week, don't you think you ought to rest when you come down here?'

'What I do here does rest me.'

She looked at him. He had gone out before breakfast that very first morning, to try the mare that he had taken the unaccountable fancy to. Katharine had watched from a window, with her heart in her mouth—had at last, at risk of ridicule, gone out on the porch and called, 'Do come in.'

'Why?'

'I—I'm hungry.'

'Eat, then.'

'Oh, send that vicious beast away!'

'No, I won't,' he said, and for a good hour he devoted himself to inducing the mare to take a different view of her whole duty to man. He came in hot and a little breathless, but quite amiable. 'She's just like a damned woman,' he said in his pleasant way, as he watched from the window the smoking-wet creature trembling, jerking at the halter, led away in a blanket. 'I've bought her.'

'*Bought* her? I can't see what you did that for.'

'You will—if you stay long enough,' he showed his teeth in that sardonic silent laugh.

After breakfast he had gone over to look at the new stables—stables with wonderful concrete floors, a brand-new system of drainage, ventilation, and sanitation—'this place will be as clean as a hospital ward.' But something had not been done as he had ordered. Katharine came away when he began to berate the foreman. She didn't see him again till luncheon. They went to ride after, but he sent Katharine home from the mill.

'You've had enough; good-bye—that's the road.' He went on alone to inspect the Hill farm, and never came back to tea. Katharine was not angry; she felt herself even smiling from time to time. It was sufficiently unlike the days of guilty dalliance she had heard and read of.

He came in at seven, splashed and muddy from neck to heel, having been in the saddle five hours.

'By God, I'm tired!' He stretched himself out before the fire, and his boots steamed. 'Been raining hard these two hours.'

Katharine laid down her embroidery and looked at him. 'Do you never take cold?'

He mumbled something as he poked between the bars. But he went upstairs in a moment. She wondered what he would put on.

As for herself, she dressed as if she had been going to a London dinner-party, with the exception that, had she been in town, she would have worn black. When she came down an hour later she stopped an instant at the door, with a sudden fear at her heart, fear that some close friend of hers, or of the Peterboroughs, had got upon her track and followed her. For a man in evening dress stood at the fire. A very well-cut back was turned upon her. The shine of immaculate linen reflected from the glass. She had recoiled sharply, about to run away, when the figure wheeled round. 'Why, it is you!' She came in laughing. 'You—I never saw you in evening dress before.'

'Yes, you did.'

'Oh, you mean years ago. But you weren't you, then.' She longed to tell him how well he looked. But his eyes were shining curiously as, in his turn, he scanned her. She was glad she had put a bunch of Parma violets in the front of her ivory satin gown. As she stood that instant before him, twisting her fingers in and out of the long rope of pearls that she knew set off her fairness, last night's feeling of almost intolerable excitement returned upon her. She avoided his eyes—looked right, looked left, and suddenly with outstretched hand indicated certain changes she had made in the furniture, which she had found arranged in a painful diagram, stiff, unhomelike. 'Don't you like it better so?'

He looked about the room as if he had not, until then, taken note of any change. At right angles to the fire she had drawn a sofa. Between it and the end of the hearth was now a little table with reading lamp. Opposite was the huge armchair with footstool, and at the farther side, a rather bigger table,

also lamp-lit. And books of hers, in vellum and old brocade, lay about, a silk work-bag, and various feminine odds and ends in silver and enamel—things that she was used to having by her wherever she was. And the whole room was full of flowers.

'You *do* like it a little better, don't you?' she asked. As his eyes came back after a tour of the room, a malicious gleam crossed the dark face.

'You look as if you meant to stay.'

The smile died from off her lips. Passionately she told herself: 'No gentleman would have said that.' She moved away, silent, to the far bowl of white lilac, and buried her hot face in it.

'Where did you get your flowers?'

'From the Great Matley greenhouses.'

'How did you know there were greenhouses at Great Matley?'

'I asked.'

'I told you you'd had enough.'

'Enough?'

'I expected you to go home.'

'I did go . . . home.'

'Round by Matley?'

'Oh no, I sent.'

With a great effort, as they sat down to dinner, she began to make conversation, her long training in keeping up appearances, coercing her to 'act' a little before the servants.

'I'm told some of the things didn't get down from London. I suppose it isn't easy to have much variety here,' she pursued laboriously.

'You can get everything you need here, but fish.'

'Oh, I dare say one needn't starve.' She had not meant to criticise the dinner—she was talking against, not time, but silence, and hardly knew what words she flung into the breach. But Vincent never talked except to say something. He looked at her speculatively as he broke his bread.

'Are you fussy about your food?' he demanded.

'I don't think so.'

'I'm satisfied with very plain things.'

The dinner was not amiss, but it was impossible for her to eat. Last night she could have gone—there was still time; to-night, ah, it was very different to-night. And he had jeered

at her: 'You look as if——' Feeling suddenly that she should choke:

'Is there some wine?' she asked.

'Why?'

'I'll have some if there is——'

The servant opened the cellaret—the gilded necks of champagne bottles looked out like fine plumaged birds from a crate.

'No. You mustn't have wine,' he said.

She pretended to take it in comedy vein. 'Oh yes, I must, just to-night. You know I'm not a wine-bibber, but just to-night.'

'Why just to-night?'

'Because I—I'm tired.'

'That's just the time you shouldn't drink wine. And you don't look tired. You look very well.'

The servant had gone out. She tried to laugh—leaned her head on her hand, and before she knew it, the tears were dropping on the cloth.

'What! Are you crying because I don't give you wine?' He jumped up. She, too, laughing and saying, 'Don't be silly—I—I'm just——' The light danced. She caught at the side-board. He put his arms round her, and brought her back to her chair—but after she was seated, he still leaned over her as if to speak, looked up as the door opened to admit the servant, and then went quickly back to his place.

'You're very long,' he said sharply. 'What's the trouble with you people out there?'

While the man excused, apologized, Vincent began again to talk to Katharine. 'Of course, you can have wine if you want it, but you're better without.' And he began to speak of Italian wine—thence of Italian experiences of various sorts; and presently of some brigands he had once encountered in Morocco. He told the story rather well, but he seemed in no need of the usually accepted signs of interest in his interlocutor. Even here, she noticed that questions seemed to interrupt and put him on his guard.

'When was that?'

'Oh, some years ago'—and he was off again telling of a ruse by which the leader of a gang was afterwards taken.

‘What attracted you to Morocco?’

‘I wasn’t attracted, I just went.’

But it was a good story, and he told it with a singular unconscious effectiveness, in his bald telegraphic style.

Instead of following her back to the drawing-room he went to a side-door and whistled. The dogs came bounding into the hall. He spoke to each one, calling each by name. When he reappeared in the drawing-room surrounded by them, and Katharine saw his face in the full light, she was astonished, touched even, by its kindness and good-humour. But the dogs were equally astonished, and not in the least touched to gentler feelings by the horrid discovery of a woman by the fireside. They bellowed fearfully at the apparition in white satin, while Vincent, by dint of damning them freely, at last reduced them to a grudging endurance of the intruder. But he had seen Katharine’s involuntary shrinking away. ‘Do you mind dogs?’ he demanded.

‘No, oh no,’ she said, thinking, whatever her own discomfort, it was good to see him look like that. She moved forward to the table. The bull pup, plainly a misogynist, resenting the liberty she took, and roused to renewed detestation of the petticoat, flew at Katharine with murderous intent. Vincent was upon him like a flash of lightning, and the beast had time only to set his teeth in the satin gown, before he was half-choked in those fine brown hands, that Katharine had said were ‘like a woman’s.’ Turk, gaping furiously for air, eyes starting out of his head, half throttled, would not have endorsed her opinion. He was dragged out into the hall, and there received correction. Katharine put her hands over her ears at first—but still she could hear. She ran to the door and stood among the howling dogs, praying him ‘not to do it any more.’ Vincent, still with his hand on the collar of the offending member of his family, dragged him back to the drawing-room, whither Katharine had precipitately retired, so as not to rouse the angry passions of the Turk by appearing again too prominently in the foreground. She seized her work-bag with a nervous hand, and hunted for her needle. But Turk’s feelings were not to be spared. He was dragged straight to Katharine’s feet.

‘Are you afraid of him?’ demanded Vincent, frowning.

'No,' said Katharine, not even knowing that she lied.

'That's right,' he said. 'Now!' fiercely to the dog, 'you be good to this person. Understand?' He bent over the beast with an air of such ferocity that the woman's sympathies went suddenly out again to the cowering dog. She half put out her hand to lay it on Turk's head—thought better, and dropped it at her side. Vincent patted Katharine's knee, never looking at her, eyes fastened on the dog, as he repeated, 'Understand? This is a friend.' Katharine glowed under the adoption—more grateful, prouder, than any compliment had ever made her—yet sharing not a little in Turk's nervous demoralization. For Vincent, still frowning his blackest, went on talking to the dog, alternately bullying and roughly caressing, while Katharine sat back in the chair not daring to speak or even move, divided between 'fear of the two ugly brutes,' as she said to herself, suddenly seeing the absurdity of the situation.

After a few more emotional passages, 'poor Turk,' as Katharine now thought of her enemy, lay down near the door in black dejection, and Vincent went over and stood among the good dogs, back to the fire, hands clasped behind. Glancing sideways, surreptitiously, Katharine took in the immaculate figure and the more than forbidding face, eyes half-shut, suffused and reddened, as anger always left them, fixed sullenly on the vanquished dog. Turk, as far away as he could get, crouching by the closed door, his wicked face wickeder than ever, the loose leathery mouth, sourly reflective, drooping in evil curves upon his paw, one lurid eye fixed upon his master. Katharine swallowed a hysterical laugh at the spectacle of Vincent and his bulldog glowering at one another from a distance after an engagement. But for the little choked noise that escaped her lips, no sound in the room for some moments. Quickly, deftly, she drew in and out her embroidery silk.

Vincent seemed at length to tire of glowering at Turk—to feel the oppression of silence ensuing upon the din. He looked round suddenly as one missing something. 'I must get a piano down.' Katharine, still feeling rather hysterical with suppressed laughter (she was so sure the music just silenced had, in spite of Vincent's anger, been that, after all, most to his taste), essayed to answer with becoming graciousness.

'Yes, that would be nice.' The words had no sooner left her lips than she remembered that speech of his. 'You look as if you meant to stay,' and her mood darkened. The surface comedy was broken through, showing again the grimness of the situation for a woman such as she. 'You play, yourself?' she asked.

'No.'

'Sing?'

'No.'

'Then it would hardly be worth while.'

She worked feverishly at her pattern, holding the more rigidly to an aspect of tranquillity, since she could not coerce her heart as he had done the dog. If she could only whip it into submission! The heavy-freighted seconds passed. As he stood there by the fire she had the illusion of seeing him with unusual vividness, while she kept her eyes on her work.

At last: 'Do you know what o'clock it is?' he said.

'Yes.'

'Well, it's country bed-time.'

'Good-night,' she said, nodding at him, and going on with the petal of her flower.

He came and stood in front of her. What would he do next? She began to tremble in all her limbs, tremble so that she could not control her hand to make the stitches even. But worked on with unraised eyes. What would he do? Was he getting out of patience—he who had so little? Was he looking at her as he did at Turk? She could have laughed, and still more easily have wept. Was it possible that he—— Ah, dear Heaven! Was he gazing down with such a look as she had dreamed of, and never yet had seen?

Lower still he stooped. What was it? What did he mean? Still she dared not raise her face, and yet her eyelids fluttered—longing to lift and welcome him.

'I wonder,' he began at last, and with a start she raised her eyes. He was not looking at her at all—but gravely studying the hornèd petals of the columbine. 'I wonder what would happen to me if I had to make another just like that, or be hung. Or rather I don't wonder. I know.'

'You'd say "I'll be hanged" for a change.'

‘For a change?’

‘Yes. Ordinarily, you’d say “I’ll be damned.”’

‘Oh no, not now, I wouldn’t.’

‘Since when did you leave off?’

‘Oh, years ago,’ he said quite seriously. ‘When I first came back from the wilds, I used to swear like a trooper.’

‘Really. And you never do that now?’

‘It’s worn off. It wouldn’t do in my profession—used to frighten the women into fits.’

‘I’m glad you never do it now,’ she said, giving way to smiles.

What an odd creature it was! Where was the charm of him? She couldn’t have told for her life. She only knew as she looked up at him, that there was no other man in the world. But for fear he should see something too much of this, she bent over her embroidery again.

‘Put that away.’

‘I must finish this bit.’

He attempted to take the work out of her hands.

‘Be careful! You’ll prick me! Ah no, it’s you!’ He had dropped the embroidery. ‘I’m so sorry.’

He rubbed a crimson drop off his hand on his handkerchief. ‘And now my columbine is blood-stained,’ she said. With the unhurt hand he again laid hold of the work. She allowed him to have it, but stood up.

‘Let me fold it properly.’

‘You’re exactly like a child making excuses to sit up late.’

CHAPTER VII

MONDAY morning.

From the hall where Katharine stood to see Vincent off, she could see through the open door, the square of wintry landscape lit palely by the struggling sunshine. Moist and chill, but very sweet, the early morning air invaded the warm house. The Turk was on the threshold, looking dourly from his master to the objectionable woman. Was it only the Turk's morning mood, or was he really so much uglier by broad day? As he watched the preparations for his master's departure he seemed to suggest with an extra gleam of malice in his wicked eye, an extra festoon in the loose black leather of his mouth: 'Take the strange woman back to town and lose her.' The other dogs were skirmishing about the groom, whose head appeared at the left of the steps as he stood holding the horse.

'So you're not coming to the station?'

'I don't believe I will.'

As Vincent pulled on his driving gloves she thought he looked a trace less pleased with life. 'Good-bye,' then. Without so much as shaking hands he turned on his heel, looked back at her from the door, and, with that sardonic grin of his, inquired brusquely: 'Shall I find you here when I get back?'

She swallowed before she could bring out words—and he went on: 'You'll get tired of it, down here,' a little angrily as if to announce: Don't suppose you can *surprise* me by making off in my absence.

'Tired?' she had echoed, leaning against the hall table.

'Bound to,' he jerked out. 'Whirligig existence you've led!'

'I should get tired if—if you stayed away too long.'

'Got to stay away till Friday.'

‘Yes, I know that.’

He looked down at the catch in his glove. Five days before she would see him. Should she write to him? Would he, after all, expect that—even like it?

‘Shall you write to me?’ she said.

‘*Write?*’ in the tone of one saying throttle, or cut off an ear. Then suspiciously, ‘What about?’

‘Oh—a—just to let me know . . . you’re alive.’

‘I expect somebody’d mention it if I was dead.’

She left the table and came nearer to him. ‘What do you want me to do while you’re gone?’

‘*I don’t care what you do.*’ But the odd thing was that despite its roughness, the speech had strangely the effect of installing her here, of leaving her in formal possession. A Spaniard would have said with a bow and a roll of the eyeball: ‘My house and my gardens, my servants, my horses, they are yours, most beautiful lady.’ Vincent’s version of that was: ‘*I don’t care what you do,*’ for he added—‘Don’t break your neck. Pete’s your beast. Ride every day—and be out all you can. This is the place for you if—you can stand it. Good-bye.’

* * * * *

He telegraphed Friday morning. Katharine thrilled to think of his writing ‘Vincent’ on a message to her. He was coming by the early train. She would go and meet him. All the day, whether she rode or walked, wrote or idled by the fire, she was meeting him in imagination at the train—ridiculously, childishly happy, as she said to herself; yes, and excited, too. He was coming, coming home. The time of his absence had been in one way long, and yet the days had never lagged. The world here seemed to be full of things to do—or rather to think about. Making the most of being still a semi-invalid, Katharine on the day after her arrival had told the housekeeper that everything should go on as before. And deep relief fell upon the domestics of High Winston. Katharine was out of doors the greater part of every day, as Vincent had prescribed, in rain or shine, riding, walking, building castles by daylight and by dark; at night sending herself to sleep with stories; deliberately, as only the imaginative may, shutting out that disturber of inward peace ‘Reality,’ behind the barred and padded doors that open upon dreams.

She went about this house of his in a secret rapture. All these things—everything she touched and looked upon was *his*. Not mere chairs and tables, not mere guns and sticks, whips, pipes, old hats, as they might look to the casual eye, but things glorified by his possession of them. His personality was stamped upon them all, giving to the meanest, value and significance, like the plain letter 'N' that so overshadows the mere crown on some trifle that was Buonaparte's.

Not that alone. Himself was everywhere.

As she looked across the drawing-room that first evening she spent alone here, she had a vision of him flung upon the sofa, his black head buried in the red cushion. The sense of his being there was so strong upon her, that she got up and went over to the sofa, smiling and looking down into his face. Before she knew what she was doing, she was on her knees bending over the cushion. And she kissed the silk.

A piano came down on Wednesday. But she had not been without music, yet had no feeling that it was she who made it. *He* did that with his name.

'Garth!' She said it in her heart with a sense of its surpassing sweetness, as any schoolgirl might. She longed to say it aloud. They had never yet called each other by their Christian names—and it was a pity, since, 'Garth! Garth!' was so beautiful to say. She took to whispering it when she felt it was safe to do so, out in the sunlit open, by day—in the dark of the night as she lay in bed. 'Garth! Garth!'

She remembered the talks at Ventnor about poetry, and as she read new verses aloud in the seclusion of her room, or the equal solitude of the wood, wondered what Mary would say to them. For the Duchess of Worcester had been a memorably good audience in those Isle of Wight days, that seemed to lie so far behind. A discreet woman, too—with a full life of her own, and no inconvenient taste for research into another's. It was of course possible to use the Ventnor address, but Katharine planned how she would take the north-bound train from Matley to Parninton, and post from there to Worcester House—giving her friend the publisher's address, and instructions for sending on.

Yet, after all, what waste of words to string rhymes and make songs! What could even a great poet say so eloquent as 'Garth'?

And then she laughed at herself, and then whispered 'Garth!' again, with a sense of quick delight—quite new, as if she had never tried the spell before.

The sound of Vincent's dog-cart crunching gravel had hardly died that Monday morning, when Katharine set herself to the task of making friends with the Turk. Jackson had appeared, as Vincent, reins in hand, was in the act of wrapping the rug round his legs. The man snapped a chain on Turk's collar, and was taking him off when Katharine came out on the porch. Vincent had looked up, lifted his hat, and then driven off.

'Where are you going with the dog?'

'I have orders to keep him on the chain—for this week.'

'Why is that?'

'I think it's on account of you, ma'am.' She walked beside the two down to the kennels, and stayed there an hour or more.

The other dogs were already decently disposed—and, poor things, were neglected for their virtues' sake. But Turk! In pursuance of a plan, Katharine returned to the kennels after luncheon. The object of her interest received her with horrid manifestations. She was heartily glad he was on the chain. Nevertheless, in half an hour or so when he was calmer she got Jackson to give the Turk his liberty—and she leaned a good deal on Jackson, in spirit, during the moments that immediately followed. She spent the greater part of the afternoon down there.

The next morning she released the Turk herself, but in the presence of Jackson, who saw with manifest astonishment and some misgiving his master's orders contravened.

Every day, twenty times in every day, Katharine would despair of making the conquest she had set her heart upon. The process of making friends with the Turk was like learning a new language. You toil and toil, and seem to be exactly where you were at the beginning. You do advance, but you cannot believe it. Nothing seems a whit less hard than it did at first. You despair; but if you keep at it, however self-contemptuously, one day you find, all of a sudden, that you have accomplished more than you had dreamed. You are getting hold of the thing after all. It was just so in the conquest of the Terrible Turk. He would infinitely prefer starving to death apparently, rather than eat anything

Katharine gave him. At least, while she was there, he wouldn't so much as look at it. Very well, she would go away. When she came back the plate was clean, but the Turk ready to glare at her with added fury, quick to growl the menace: 'Don't presume to think it was I ate your offering. Never! 'sdeath! Gad-zooks! I despise your chicken!—but I'd eat *you* as soon as wink.'

Since he scorned to squire her in her walks (you'd as soon expect the King to go shopping with you) she would send for him the moment she came indoors and keep him in the room with her, till bed-time.

It was hard, after all the trouble she took, to hear him begin to rumble like a four-legged volcano when she reappeared the next morning. But Katharine was hugely elated at his consenting to snap a wish-bone out of her hand, on Thursday evening, after he had been sedulously starved all day. That was the moment when she said to herself, 'Hurrah! I am getting hold of this new language after all.' The next morning the internal rumbling was a half-hearted sort of performance, as of one whose mind wasn't on his work.

After the telegram came, on Friday, Katharine, in an access of joy and excitement, ventured gingerly to pat him. *He stood it.* Ah! ha! she would do that before Garth. She wouldn't tell him how much trouble she'd taken, but she would flaunt the result.

As the afternoon wore on, her excitement grew. How would Garth look when he caught sight of her? Would he like it that she should go to meet him? Would he be a little pleased that she couldn't wait? . . . Would the man who sold him the mare perhaps be in the train? Would he come on to Vincent's station, that he might talk 'horse' a little longer?

As the time drew near for the dog-cart to appear, her sense of gladness waned until it yielded to eclipse.

Will he stare, when he sees me there, instead of Jackson? Will he laugh, in that malicious way of his, to see me so impatient for his coming? Or will he throw a sulky, half-noticing look that will say: 'Oh, you're still here, are you?' and then talk to the dogs. After all, why should she go? There might be someone in the train or even on the platform —someone who would recognise her.

If she could have felt sure that he would like her to come she

would have risked that—but how could she tell? No, she was too nervous. She would stay at home. And she would keep Turk. Yes. She rang and explained that it was too cold for driving, and Jackson was to go alone. Then she went upstairs and changed her gown. Came down rather sadly—talked to Turk and stared at the clock face.

He came in with the Bedlington, and two collies, and the new terrier jumping round him. Turk went majestically to offer greeting.

‘Hello!’ whether to her or Turk it would be hard to tell. But she stood up smiling and intending to say: ‘How do you do?’ The words that came were: ‘Oh, I’m glad you’re back.’

‘Bored, eh?’ He flung himself down in the sofa corner, and let his hand fall till he could reach and pull the brown collie’s ears, while Turk growled under his breath at these tactless attentions to an inferior.

‘No, I haven’t been bored,’ she said.

‘What makes you glad to see me back, then?’

A sudden great longing to make him understand, took her off her feet—swept her forward with outstretched hands, eyes full of shining, and a flitting scarlet in her cheeks. He watched her with an air of quiet curiosity, and when halfway to his sofa she stopped abruptly, he grinned. For Turk had crossed her path, trailing a long solemn growl. If she had had herself better in hand, she would not, at that critical moment, have lost her new-found authority with the dog. But breathless, unmindful, overwrought, she started back and uttered a little cry. And so undid the work of five painstaking days. She saw at once that, upon her betrayal of fear, Turk had cast off all allegiance. But she was too entirely under the dominion of her new impulse to think about that or to care. Cautiously she coasted round the dragon in her path, till she had nearly gained the sofa. A sudden vicious rumbling brought her again to a standstill.

‘Come on,’ said Vincent, still with his grin. ‘If you haven’t been bored, what makes you glad to see me?’

‘I’d come and tell you if . . .’ She looked down, half-amused, half angry, on her enemy.

‘Afraid, are you?’ He turned approvingly to Turk. ‘You keep her in order, do you, while I’m away,’ and he went on con-

versing with the Turk, while Katharine stood, not daring to advance.

When he had got his full measure of enjoyment out of that: 'What do you stand there for? Why don't you sit down?' he said suddenly. He did not add, 'here by me,' but it was to the sofa that she moved. Turk stood up and rumbled worse than ever. Again she stopped, half laughing, half annoyed. Vincent's pleasure in the performance was unblushing. 'Don't like her, eh? Why not? What's she been doing you don't like? Don't want her here, eh?' Suddenly he leaned forward, put out his hand and took hers. But he had the air of doing it solely to enrage the dog. Katharine clung to the hand, saying in low, persuasive tones: 'Oh, send them away.'

But he only laughed, through Turk's renewed manifestations of dislike and jealousy.

'Hate one another, eh?' the master said with satisfaction.

'Not at all,' protested Katharine, but still watching Turk uneasily and holding tight to Vincent's hand. 'You don't bring out the best of bull-dog nature. It's only since you've come back that he behaves like this. We've made friends.'

'Oh, you have, have you?' He looked at her sideways.

'Yes. Turk is only pretending. He comes to me for his dinner now.'

'What?'

'And he took a walk with me this morning.'

'Oh, look here!' he laughed out his unbelief.

'But it's quite true. It's only since you came in that he has fallen from grace. I think you two react most evilly on each other. Either of you alone is——'

'Turk! She is trying to sow dissension in our family. Turk! Is it true you like her—like this stranger?' . . . He bent to Katharine, disengaging himself from her clinging hold, and laying his hand on her shoulder, while out of the corners of his eyes he glanced down at the jealous Turk—'Made friends with her, have you?' Disavowal of the imputed alliance was instant, unmistakable. Vincent lifted two fingers and passed them down Katharine's cheek. The sound of subterranean wrath was mounting to higher levels as with an air of deliberate malice repeating: 'Really do like this stranger, do you?'—ostentatiously he put

his arm round her, and drew her close against him. Katharine shut her eyes dizzily, hardly knowing that Turk had backed off with a very ugly sound, till she felt Vincent's hold suddenly leave her. He had sprung up, and as she opened her eyes she had a vision of the great bull-dog in the air coming down upon her, and Vincent meeting him, catching him by his gaping jaw, in a fashion that looked horribly dangerous. She gave a sudden cry and flung forward on a perfectly blind instinct to help. 'Sit down!' shouted Vincent, at the same time giving the dog a kick that sent him howling out of the room, with all the others slinking after. 'Don't you ever try to interfere in any dog trouble!'

Katharine had sat down shaking with excitement and with both hands held tight over her heart. 'All right!' she said, breathless.

He looked at her, and then scowled at the door, through which the dogs had vanished. Then coming nearer to an apology than Garth Vincent had ever been in his life, he muttered: 'It wasn't altogether Turk's fault this time. But if he ever flies at you again . . . I'll kill the brute.'

She said nothing. He came nearer and asked brusquely, 'Pain come back?' She only smiled faintly, still holding her hands tight over her heart. He bent down, took her hands away, and thrust his own into her bodice, saying professionally:

'Going like a trip-hammer, eh?'

And she, making no resistance, dropped her head against his arm. All she had meant to say when Turk had stopped her, summed up in a single syllable:

'Garth.'

And he: 'Oh, you've discovered I've got a front name, have you?'

CHAPTER VIII

SIX weeks had gone—and again she was counting the hours as she did at each week's end—the hours and then the minutes till he should come.

Although it was winter still, the sensitive human spirit, roaming field and wood, could feel the first faint stirrings of the spring, and searched the frosty weald for sign of confirmation. No clear answer from the meadow, no definite sign from the wood, for all through the winter, primroses had lit their pale lamps here and there, and set them to glimmer in the shelter of hedges, or to light the secret places of the wood.

It was the moment when the coming miracle seems most incredible and is yet most desired—the moment upon February's threshold when one says to one's self almost with misgiving: other miracles may not happen, this particular one will never fail. And yet there is no faintest sign that winter's sleep and silence will not endure forever, no least assurance to the ear or eye, that out of this grave of all the years will rise the flower-eyed Spring in her mantle of sun-flecked green.

There where a tiny canal stretches its grey ribbon for boundary between Garth Vincent's fields, over there two starlings splash and flick the water. In the willows along the brink a dozen more—*they* know.

Spring! what would it bring to her? What was to be *her* awakening? For she too, in a fashion, had slept, had been quiescent as the bare brown fields, not looking before or after; lulled; yes, yes, she had slept, and must awake.

Standing under the leafless willows she drew her hands across her eyes and with finger-tips still resting on her temples, looked across the stubble to the many-gabled house. It would be there

that Fate would find her—there that she would wake out of this long slumber to her greatest joy or sorrow.

What was he thinking? Had he a definite plan?—or had he too been sleeping? Certainly he gave no sign.

She was even more conscious than before, that what to the superficial eye was rough, boorish in him, wore to her a kind of dignity, conveyed a flattery even, that silken speech had failed of. In his bareness of approach there was still this something that seemed to lift her up. Instead of feeling any loss in her lover, she was conscious mainly of a strange high discipline that wore the air to her of moral gain—ironic as the epithet would sound in many a good man's ear.

But the end—what was to be the end? However much he might in his unwilling heart have come to care for her, she could not flatter herself that she was necessary to him. Not even that she had won his confidence.

That hurt to his faith in woman, however it had come about, was so deep it seemed past healing. Nothing so disheartened her as to find that after all the proofs that she had given, he did not really trust her. His first instinct was still and always, suspicion; self-defence against man's enemy, woman.

And yet. . . . She dropped her hands and walked across the stubble towards the mill. And yet . . .

In the bend of the quiet reach above the race, a wild duck was lurking. Jackson had said 'next month, bar black frost, his nest will be there.'

Spring.

'—and Garth?' . . . she said to herself, standing still that she might not scare away the wild duck—very much as she had learned to stand quiet, gentle, unshaken, before the untamed forces in the nature of the man she loved.

His defects of temper and of taste, his deliberate harshness that seemed a savage need to make others share in his disgust of life; his ineradicable distrust of his kind—no 'attitude' but the heavy end of his life's burden as Katharine saw it—none of these things were absent from her unshrinking vision of the man as she had come to know him here at High Winston.

She had not ceased to wonder at his power of 'dividing his life into air-tight compartments,' as she expressed it to herself.

Nothing of one experience spilled over into another, no mood overlapped on to the next. No admission in the Present of the Past. No hint this morning of last night. An air so 'oblivious' that an invincible shyness must fall upon the one who so much as dreamed of reminding him of hour or incident which he seemed to wipe so clean out of existence, that its ever having been became a matter requiring evidence.

It was as if he lay under some necessity to say without the clumsy aid of words: 'Being human, I have my times of weakness. These are woman's opportunity. But do you imagine you have got hold of me—come one whit nearer?' If so, his the task to undeceive her.

In his den behind the empty conservatory, where even the dogs were unwelcome, Garth Vincent, smoking, reading agricultural and 'horsey' papers, medical pamphlets, reports of scientific societies, disquisitions in French and German on disease—deaf to any sound, blind to any sight beyond words printed on a page—a creature dead to all outward manifestations, yet concerned intensely with things silent and unseen—that was one person. Another, the man who rode his horses to a foam, or tramped the countryside, in fair weather or in foul, all eyes and ears, not for the poetry, the spirit, but the externality of country life.

While he ate and drank, listened to the singing, chaffed the dogs, or made Katharine talk, rather than talk himself—that was yet another man, simple, often boyish, as by hazard, kind. If even here reserved, it was with a reserve like the schoolboy's, that seems less a barrier to check advance, than a shield for shyness.

None of these, precisely like that Garth Vincent of the more revealing moods, and quick repentance of them. Against this last man he bore an open grudge—at first angry, then sullen; but less and less of either, Katharine thought, as time went on. And yet never wholly forgiven, never reconciled. Would he ever be?

Even in quite early days Katharine guessed the significance to her of the answer to that question. 'You are like the new terrier,' she said once, speaking of a lost and starving dog that had followed Garth home from Matley one Sunday and

declined thereafter to leave. Vincent, while professing to detest the cur, allowed him to stay on. 'Yes, very like the new terrier.'

'I suppose you mean because I've got a vile temper,' he said. 'You are maligning—the terrier.'

He accepted that.

'Have you been told you have "a vile temper"?'?

'Yes,' he answered promptly.

'Who says so?'

'Everybody that's ever had the privilege of knowing me.'

'Well, that isn't why you're like the terrier. It's because you've both of you had a bad time and can't get the recollection of it out of your head.'

He put on that impenetrable black mask of his.

But Katharine continued: 'When I come suddenly on Stray, he doesn't see *me*, he sees an imaginary woman with a sharp weapon. *Now* do you understand?'

He made no answer.

'Yet Stray knows this particular woman; knows if I stoop to pat him, there's no need to expect a blow. But I might as well go about with a club. He's always shying at it.'

'And you think I'm like that?'

'Did nobody else ever tell you?'

'A woman told me the other day—clever woman, too—that I was a born cynic.' He looked distinctly pleased.

'Oh,' said Katharine, 'a cynic is only a sentimentalist whose feelings have been dreadfully hurt.'

* * * * *

Yet she had no desire to cover with fair words any fact in the problem he presented to her. The woman who had been called romantic, poetic, before whom men had systematically veiled, denied, the less admirable aspects of human nature—this same woman learned how little perfection has to do with the winning or the holding of devotion.

Just as in another sort of strait, she would have scorned to 'make a show,' to pretend to be better off than she was, so here, a kind of pride prevented her from consciously painting Garth Vincent as better than life revealed him. Her reward was an intenser yearning towards the untamed and unbelieving spirit,

a compensation in hugging closer such marred excellence as their hours together had betrayed.

He had so much, this man, she could say to herself. I haven't imagined it; it is all there. Kindness, deep, unfaltering, yet shrinking almost with anger from the name. She suspected him of capacity for heroism. Knew him convicted of truth that would not flinch. And under his hardness, natural and acquired, a sensitiveness like a woman's.

Such a man must have a soul. Oh, to wake it!—to wake it! Not only to make him care. To make him willing to show he cared. Not in gusts of passion, but with the steadfast tenderness that is ready to show itself unabashed—that fails not any hour.

Sometimes she would look back to those first days when she lay in her old room at Peterborough House—not a few months since, but surely many years ago, since she lay there drawing herself back from dreams, with the saying: '*I* couldn't marry him.' By-and-by: 'How odd if I should, though.' Then: 'There isn't another real man in the world. Oh, if he would love me.'

The terms upon which she might get that love, the terms had long and long enough, been of secondary import.

Oh yes, she had travelled far. And yet had no prevision of the end.

* * * * *

Full, when he came this time, of his farm improvements—of ditching, planting, and getting ready for the Spring.

On horseback or on foot, Katharine was with him everywhere, listening to his talk with the men, showing him this and that, delighted to share the lore she had gathered through the week. No whit less than he or his men, she felt the sense of this something coming, that must be prepared for. It is time to do this; the time is nearly gone when it's any use to do that; time lost now, can never be made up. She felt the stir and thrill of these rural commonplaces, longed herself to have a hand in this great making-ready; had many a conflict to withstand temptation secretly to set bulbs in the brown earth, and bury surreptitious seeds, that like good deeds should show fair faces, bearing their gentle witness, when she had quite forgot where it was she hid them, or even that they were at all.

But she shrank and held her hand, at memory of Vincent's saying on that first evening here, when she had set about his rooms only perishable flowers, things like herself not standing firmly in this soil of his, but rootless—and yet he had looked suspiciously on them and her, and said those words that stung her still: 'You look as if you meant to stay.' But on this happy morning, when every field and almost every furrow was summoned to the great conspiracy of Spring—called on to conceive and to bring forth—Katharine found herself saying to Vincent as they crossed, again, the lower garden: 'All along here, from the porch to the far gate, you ought to have flower borders.'

'That's a woman's business. Some day——' (She waited with a strange pitiful impatience)—'some day there'll be flowers there.' Although she did not raise her eyes, she knew he never glanced towards her, but straight before him over the hedge. She felt it like a formal repudiation—not you, some other woman shall make my borders brave. As she walked steadily on beside him, and he as steadily held his peace, she kept the foolish tears from falling by making a singing little roundel out of his hard saying: 'Some day there will be flowers there.'

* * * * *

For all her watchfulness, it seemed to be happening often now, that one or other would stumble upon that horn: the Future. How do they avoid it?—those others who are consciously together 'for the present.' Ah, it was easier no doubt in towns, where such things chiefly happened—there all life was tentative and hand to mouth. But however fair your lot is in the country, you are face to face with the broad and basic things upon which life is built. Present beauty is no more than the cover of the book of the year. And here at High Winston where everything was hourly done in reference to suns that had not risen, and to rains that would be falling when other moons had waned, here where every act was one of faith, looking towards harvest and content to wait—how should one walk here and not think of the future? She fell to dwelling on it more and more. When that field is sowed . . .? Where shall I be when the grain sprouts there? Who will walk here with him when the tassels are yellow and full?

He will be just as pleased. He will have his horses and his

dogs—field, forest and farm—and in the town his sick people besieging, clinging to him, and his fame that grows and grows, like the saplings in the copse—and he'll have flowers in the borders of his life, as many as ever he will.

* * * * *

She knew that before her advent at High Winston, Vincent had usually gone back to town by a late train on Sunday. He had never done that in all these weeks—and she listened with a sinking of the heart as he told Jackson to bring the dog-cart round for the Sunday afternoon train.

The afternoon! That meant that he was going somewhere—going to some London dinner-party. And on their Sunday. The sense of being deserted fell chill upon her. She said nothing, and strove to show that her spirits were undashed. Instinctively she felt that he was armed and braced to meet remonstrance. But she would give him no opportunity to look that look, and say that rough word held as ready as any lance in battles long ago. The effort that it cost her to 'be just the same' was a kind of tonic—till he had driven away.

Then came the worst hours she had known.

* * * * *

Turk, who had gone with his master to the station, came back towards six o'clock, to find his new ally huddled together in the depths of the great chair by the drawing-room fire. A sombre twilight was filling the room, yet Katharine had not rung for the lamps.

She held out her hand, spoke to the dog with an absurd sense of gratitude to the beast for his coming back to her.

'What do you want, old fellow? Shall we go for a run before it's dark?'

The sound of the wind rattling the casements and wailing down the wide chimney, had brought so forcibly back that first night of her coming—wrought so upon her nerves, that she had been saying ever since Vincent left her, that she must go out and meet the wind in the wood, where it piped a tune less mournful, less mixed with the sorrows of men. But the weight of her wretchedness had kept her anchored in the great chair, till Turk came in and seemed to say: 'Yes, we're dreadfully lonely. Let's do something.'

She put on a reefer and pinned a tam-o'-shanter on her yellow hair. Followed by the dog and without conscious plan, she found herself going the way Vincent and she had gone in the morning—down across the bridge and past the mill to the field behind, where a rush-fringed pond lay darkling in a hollow below a group of elms.

She had no wish to see again even dimly through the dusk, the bodies of the young rooks blown out of their nests by the last week's gale. But here she had come with Garth, and here she must come again—to see if any of him was there, since he was nowhere in the echoing house. She stood with the dog close at her side and looked up.

These were the tall trees that she could see from her bed-room windows—even from her bed she could watch them, stately, black against the dawn, or tossing in the winds of March, the rooks' nests perilously swinging, and the old birds circling, crying—and now the young rooks dead at the great tree's foot.

But she had been right, the wind's song was less sorrowful out of doors. Of no house Katharine had ever inhabited did the wind take such complete possession as of Garth Vincent's. No exception that night of her arrival. The first impression of draughty hall, doors blown violently to, flapping shutter and the voice of the complaining wind sighing in all the chambers—that impression was the one dominant and oftenest recurring.

'What do you call the place?' she had asked him.

'I don't call it anything.'

'I shall call it the House of the Winds,' she had said, and it was the name she gave to the first poem she had written here.

Often she had lain in her bed, and with eyes fixed on these great trees, and the high-perched homes of the rooks, wondered to herself the same thing she had said to Garth that morning, as they two had stood here looking up from the dead birds to the far-away nests, and then lower down to the many convenient crotches where young birds might safely lodge: 'I thought dumb things had such wise instinct. Hasn't the rook-race learned how fierce the March winds blow? Don't they see what comes of building up so high?'

'You're expecting more of rooks than you get in men,' he had said shortly, and walked on.

The wind blew an echo of the words in her face, as she stood without him under the elms in the dusk. What was the use of warning anybody? Of what good experience even? Here was she, Katharine Dereham. She had known all her life what was the fate of women who took the step that she had taken. Of what use had that been to hold her back?

As well as the rooks she knew the winds blew fierce in March, but had she therefore built safely in a crotch of the world's big tree? Not she—nor any other who loves the nest hung high.

There was more light out here than in the house, and one could see the glorious cloud-packed sky, lowering, tumultuous, black masses driving across the face of the moon, giving to the human atom looking up a feeling that from some Godlike point of vantage she watched the rolling of the world.

And down here underneath, forever the rooks build high, build high, and ever the March winds blow. . . . She went back across the darkening fields making a song. Hurriedly the next day, posting from Parminton, she sent it to the London publisher for inclusion in the book that he was bringing out in April—'A Kalendar and other Poems, by K. D.'

* * * * *

On the second Friday in April he wired that he would not be down till to-morrow, and when he came it was to show a tired, harassed face, a mouth set like iron. Katharine asked no questions, but set herself with all that she had in her (and she possessed a genius in these things) to soothe and cheer him. It lifted her very high to find how well she had succeeded. And then on Sunday at noon, again that blow in the face:

'I want the cart for the afternoon train.'

But she said no word—none to Vincent, but many to Katharine, cautioning, admonishing. I can bear that he should be away all the week, why should it be so bitterly hard to let him go a few hours earlier? But he was a whole day late this week, wailed the heart of the woman. Never mind—that was because he was hard at work. He is doing great things in London. You ought to be glad and proud. And so I am. That is why I can bear to be without him so much of the time. But *to-day*—Sunday, he goes to amuse himself. Ah, but you are mean-spirited! You don't mind how hard, or how incessantly he works, it is

a little *pleasure* that you grudge him. Oh, you're a poor creature! But I don't grudge him pleasure—I only want to be the one to give it to him. Or, I want, at the least, to be beside him when others do.

* * * * *

'Garth.'

'Yes.'

But she sat and looked in the fire.

'Well, what is it?'

'Couldn't you stay with me to-day?'

'No.' A long pause: 'Well?'

'I said nothing.'

'Why don't you?'

'What is there to say?'

'Why, the usual thing that women find to say.'

'What is the usual thing?'

'As if you don't know! Why, I saw it on your lips—"Where are you going?" "Who are you going to see?"' She sat quite still. 'Well? Go on. Let's get it over.'

'I have never put those questions.'

'Not yet.'

'And I never will.'

'Why not?'

'Perhaps because I've realized how afraid you've been that I would.'

'Humph! I'm not exactly *afraid*, you know.'

'It's true. You're only afraid when you see I don't do these things.' He looked at her with a sudden sharp gleam. She went on: 'It disconcerts you that I don't.'

'Oh, does it?' he retorted, showing his teeth.

'Yes, you find me unaccountable. You don't like that. *You* like to be the unaccountable one.'

'Because I'm not always explaining myself?'

'Because you're always warding off an imaginary attack upon your confidence. And you like to think the past is an impenetrable mystery—but the mystery is growing very transparent. You tell me so much of it every hour you're here.'

'I tell you!'

'Yes. You've just told me that you've known intimately

a nagging woman. She accounts for a good deal in you.' He stared at her suspiciously. But Katharine went on: 'Yes, you've known well some woman, who instead of being glad when you came in, wouldn't give herself up to being glad, till she'd said, "Why are you late?" "Where have you been?" "What made you stay so long?" "Who was there?" "Why must you go again?" I'm not blaming that woman. I'm rather sorry for her.' He had been frowning, with that don't-you-dare-come-any-further look, that he put on when anyone ventured to touch upon his private concerns, and as in despite of that, she had gone on, he jumped to his feet.

'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' she echoed quietly.

In the act of turning to the door he paused: 'Like that?' He stood with his head on one side, seemed rather pleased on the whole that she made no move to kiss him. She kept her seat with an effort of self-control, and she held out her hand with something royal in it commingling of fine impulse and yet finer repression. It was conciliatory, and yet it was of the essence of dignity.

He had the air of not seeing the hand held out—turned on his heel and laid his lean fingers on the door-knob. 'So you don't want to know when I'll be back?'

'I don't want to ask you.'

'Well, *that's* a good thing,' he laughed harshly, and went out.

Long she sat there. What a life! What a life for Katharine Dereham! she said to herself, and yet her eyes were not so much unhappy as wondering.

The light came into the old room, level and incarnadined. Looking up, she saw the blaze of the sunset through the delicate green veil of young leafage. She went out through the garden which was no garden, and into the orchard, which did honour to its beautiful name. On the gnarled root of an old apple-tree she sat down to watch the glory fade. A step behind—and without looking, her blood told her who was there. Then he was not gone yet! He would miss his afternoon train unless he

drove like mad. But driving like mad was just what he sometimes liked to do.

She held her breath as he came up behind her, treading softly on the tangled grass. Her heart flew out to meet him, but she sat quite still. He stopped and hesitated. She knew that he was vaguely embarrassed, undecided. She had accustomed him to welcoming looks. It was as if he resented her obliviousness. He whistled to Turk, with an eye on Katharine. When he saw that still she did not move, he half turned to go, on an impulse of anger—changed his mind, came up and thrust a branch of wild cherry blossom in her face. She lifted quiet eyes. 'It's lovely,' she said. He dropped the branch across her lap, and laughing a little wickedly, as one who remembers having played a successful joke, and announces that he does not expect the victim to be as pleased as the perpetrator—he rubbed the back of his hand lightly on her cheek.

She smiled up at him.

'You take it like that, do you?' he said suddenly. And with a schoolboy's note in his voice, added, 'Then come for a ride.'

'To the station?'

'No! The woods.'

CHAPTER IX

VINCENT had pointed out to her the publisher's flaming advertisement of her book. She read it, smiling, but apologetic. What rot he must be thinking it! And not he alone. Little books of verse were always dropping, still born, from the London press. Hers just another, like the rest. Those sonnets she had written out of such an eager heart. How dull, belated, lacking in significance, they had looked forth from the proof. Ah, they had not stood the proof, those frail little things of her making! She threw the paper down, and talked about a broken fence and trampled grain, and whose fault.

The next Friday he brought down a daily paper and a weekly, each with a review of Katharine's 'Kalendar'; hailing a new poet, calling on all the world to listen to 'this new voice.' Katharine stared hard at the printed words, and felt she was not awake. One notice was signed. What! a 'superior' reviewer like John Waycott to break away from the stereotyped mild praise and tempered blame, to sound the loud trump and clash the cymbals in this daring fashion, ushering in 'a true poet'—'the one woman since Christina Rossetti died, who,' etc., etc. The feeling uppermost was one of bewilderment. It was delightful, of course, but it was chiefly 'queer.' *Her* verses make men feel like that? Why, she must look at them again, and see what it was they meant—those critics!

But not before Garth. Oh, how he must be grinning—inwardly, if not . . . no, she couldn't look at him. A feeling of painful shyness mastered her. 'Are you coming out? it's beautiful now out of doors!' She stood with her eyes on the sleeve of her jacket, pulling at a bit of loosened braid. Yes, *that*, at all events, was very like a poetess; it was too much in character.

If people were going to call her a true poet, she really must mend her clothes. But it was hard, this getting on without Natalie. A rustle of paper. She looked up, and saw that Vincent was reading the more flaming of the two reviews. For the third time, had Katharine but known.

‘Oh come, Garth,’ she said, making for the door.

‘In a minute.’ But when he finished that, he re-read the other notice, too. However, he had the decency not to talk about either of them. Katharine felt it was very nice of him.

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An hour or so after dinner that Friday night: ‘Go and sing,’ he said—and she did.

‘That’s enough foreign stuff. Let’s have some English.’

She began *Land of Hope and Glory*. Impatiently he interrupted. ‘Sing the one about the rooks.’

‘Rooks?’ returned Katharine, playing the prelude to another of her own songs. ‘You mean “The Blackthorn and the Missel-thrush.”’

‘I don’t anything of the kind,’ he said firmly. ‘I mean the one about

“ Forever the rooks build high, build high,
And ever the March winds blow——” ’

She coloured at the sound of her song upon his lips. It was one of the things John Waycott had quoted. Katharine herself had set it to music, and had sung it now and then for several weeks without, of course, saying where she got it; and always, when Vincent was there, with a sense of daring, as one making bold experiment. She would have liked to refuse to sing it now; but she felt it would be rather silly.

When she finished, and he sat there quite still, expressionless as usual at such times, a great longing caught hold of her to hear him say something kind about the song. Had it been mere curiosity to hear it again with this new knowledge of its origin? Ah, if he would only say in private, here with her alone to listen, a tenth, a twentieth of what John Waycott had said to all the world, how infinitely happy, how rewarded she would be! She sat playing softly and longing to know what was going on inside the black head that showed above the back of the armchair.

'I thought you despised that sort of thing,' she said at last, still moving her fingers softly over the keys.

'Sing the rooks again.'

And John Waycott's praise was gloriously overtopped!

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Even after that, unmeasured was her astonishment to find that Vincent collected such notices of her book as he came across during the week in London, and religiously presented them to her when he came home. He seemed never to have heard of a press-cutting agency, though as long ago as in Lady Peterborough's lifetime, Katharine had been accustomed to seeing little packets of clippings in green paper, which would set forth how her ladyship and Miss Dereham had worn this and that at the Opera, so-and-so at Her Majesty's garden party, and how they had opened a bazaar or gone to the Riviera. The Agency had kept on sending these things about after Katharine to town or country address: what Lord Peterborough had left her; how the Sargent picture had been reproduced; how the original of it was seeking health abroad. Several such announcements had made the journey from Peterborough House to Torquay, to the Isle of Wight, and thence to the post-office at Great Matley, a market town five miles from Winston. Since the publication of the 'Kalendar,' it rained notices.

With the aid of green packets of information, Katharine knew well enough how the ball was rolling over there in London; how the slatings she had looked for, failed to come; how she was paragraphed and pictured and praised; and talked of as making her home now, for some years, in Italy. She had secreted these clippings, with a prayer that Garth would be too busy, if not too indifferent, to read such as he came across in town. He had stood the Rook Song nobly, but he hated poetry in general, and he hated what he called 'rot.' There was no blinking the fact that 'A Kalendar, and Other Poems,' came strictly under the meaning of the term. She could not fathom his intention in saving up these notices, and bringing them home to her, if it were not to scoff at them and her, in some convenient season. Then one day it came over her with all the force of a thing grotesquely out of character, incredible as true, that Garth Vincent, of all men, was agreeably affected by the stir Katharine's work

was making. She had expected jeers, even anger, and behold he was pleased! There was only one thing that you could foresee about this man, and that was that he would surprise you. He was positively proud that she had raised this little dust of praise!

Well, well—men were very odd.

This was the pouring wet Sunday, when he had not allowed her to go with him on his ride. He had changed his soaking clothes, and come down stairs, dry and warm and hungry, for the tea that she had ready by a great glowing fire. When he had been fed, he stretched out his feet comfortably to the blaze, glanced at the windows where the late April rain was dashing like spray against the port-hole of a ship—and suddenly:

‘What have you been doing?’ he said.

‘Nothing much.’

‘Been making any more songs?’

‘Of course not,’ in the tone of one reformed, who finds it hardly fair to have old sins recalled.

‘I believe you have. Where are they?’

‘*Of course* I haven’t.’

‘Why, “of course”?’

She looked at him. Should she tell him? ‘You’ve been at home.’

‘Well, I don’t prevent you.’ She only smiled a little. ‘What’s my being here got to do with it?’

‘Everything.’

He stared at the fire seeming to study the matter profoundly.

It would have taken a man to be surprised at Katharine’s confession. Quite certainly, she not only never thought of her ‘success’ when he was there (unless he thrust a newspaper under eyes), she had no impulse to make other music, than that best of all—that may be played upon the harp of life. She had few of the illusions, said to beset ‘the women who do things’ as to the relative values of the things that women may do.

Poetry on paper was better than no poetry at all, but if their two lives were out of tune, what other music could make amends, or drown discord such as that? And she was full of growing fear.

All these weeks gone by, and still no nearer to that response and fusion, the assured and practised unison, the fundamental

harmony that was the kind of poetry antiphonal she longed to have her share of making in the world.

No use, she told herself the next morning after he had gone—no use to blink the facts. Here in the soft April sunshine, under apple trees in bloom, she stood environed still by storm and stress and the tempestuous dark, by all that had met her that December midnight, when he had brought her here.

No difference between now and then?

None but that she loved him better, and that people out there in the world were making a noise with her name.

The noise did little to elate a brain clear-judging enough, where the passionate heart was not the stake. Not that in this she was all unlike the mass of the moderately enlightened. For, although the world will more and more care about good work, the old illusion about fame has failed even the smaller folk. The very word, if gravely used, has a sound archaic, and summons men to think in Greek and Latin.

But the selfish world is reconciled. It is seen that like those things made in the sweated trades, fame profits least the men who make it, and too often is chief mourner at your 'Great Man's' funeral—chief loser by the levelling of death. And even where the so-called 'Fame' abides a little, the modern mind cannot, in that, read recompense to the worker in his grave. That this one waked and wrought when we were playing or asleep, it profits us who played and slept—who now can think it profits him?

And these things are beginning to be clear even to little folk, when they concern themselves with such matters at all.

The noise that Katharine Dereham's poetry was making, was just loud enough to wake her from her winter sleep. A call that she had been most happy to smile at and then close her ears to, had life been kind. But this noise that echoed out of London, mixed with the undertone of uncertainty and fear that sounded below the outer peace and gladness of her life, mixed and swelled and sounded just enough insistent to rouse her, make her look about with wide clear-seeing eyes, taking fresh note of herself, and of this shadowed and uncertain way she walked in, to an end she knew not.

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While Katharine, sitting on a footstool between Vincent's chair and the fire, was tempting Turk with fragments of after-dinner biscuit, she heard the maid come in and say in the scared voice commonly employed by that person in addressing 'the Master'—'A—a telegram, sir.' Vincent had been leaning forward, elbows on knees, chin in hand, watching the dog—the man's dark face over Katharine's shoulder, almost touching her yellow hair. She heard the envelope torn open close to her ear, for Vincent had hardly altered his position. Still leaning forward, he held the telegram so that with a side glance she could have read it. She kept her eyes on the dog. 'No answer, now,' he said gruffly, and the servant went softly out. Still he studied the message over Katharine's shoulder.

She had not once looked round. Now she tossed up another fragment of biscuit, and as Turk caught it in its descent, she said: 'He *never* misses now, even when I throw crooked. Look!' Another ivory scrap went up in the air, and again with a lazy movement and a mien of bored dignity Turk opened his jaws, and permitted the fragment to find lodgment in his capacious mouth. Katharine laughed: 'Good dog.'

Something fluttered down into her lap. Very well she knew it was the telegram, but she took no notice—turned her head the other way, and called to the new terrier, who had put his nose in at the door. 'Let's see if Turk will allow him in here.' Turk declined with fury, and Katharine had to get up and soothe him. As she rose, the paper fluttered to the floor, face uppermost. Vincent sat looking at it. Katharine seemed absorbed in the dogs.

'Give me that, will you?' he said, lolling back in his chair. She handed it to him without a glance at it.

'I wish I knew what to do about this,' he said presently. She seemed not to hear. He left the telegram on the mantel-piece that night.

As Katharine stood before the fire after breakfast, the next day, her eye caught the signature: 'Nelly.' She made no sign. But all day long the name kept pricking her.

That evening, realizing at last that he would wait in vain for Katharine to touch upon the subject, he took the telegram, scowling, and brought it to the sofa where she sat, smoothed it

out across his knees, and swore under his breath. It was monstrous unsympathetic in Katharine not to take notice of that. She picked up a book.

‘Have you seen this?’ he said at last.

‘What?’ She glanced down. ‘It’s not for me, is it?’

He held it before her. She read:

‘Leonard worse—wants to come to Winston—NELLY.’

‘Who is . . . Leonard?’

‘Who’s Nelly, you mean?’

‘Who are they both?’

He had closed thumb and finger afresh over the signature as if it would have pleased him to pinch Nelly.

‘She’s got a rotten idea in her head that it makes her younger to call herself by her front name. She’s the woman my father was fool enough to marry.’

‘Oh! Then, Leonard——’ She turned a face of sudden interest up to his. ‘Leonard is the . . . Leonard is your brother.’

‘No, he isn’t,’ he answered roughly. ‘My step-mother’s son, is what he is.’

‘But you——’ she had meant to say, you are fond of him. Instinctively she knew it would do ‘Leonard’ little good to have Garth’s weakness for him formulated. ‘You’ll let him come, I suppose.’

‘Why should I?’

‘Wouldn’t it do him good?’

‘Nothing does him good.’

‘But he has been here a great deal, hasn’t he? Won’t he feel——’

‘How do you know he’s been here?’

‘Oh, Mrs. Jackson said something about it.’ Whereupon Vincent got up suddenly, crumpled the telegram in his hand, and tossed it in the fire.

He never referred to the matter again.

Katharine, as Vincent had suspected, would have been quick to resent it, had any of his family found her here in her equivocal position. Unimaginative as Vincent was, he had prefigured that, guessed that she would shrink ‘from eyes’—had presented the possibility of ‘eyes’ out of mixed motives, as a test. Sus-

picion had been swift to ask: Does she think she has any right to keep people away?

But Katharine's heart had suddenly gone out to the crippled boy that she knew Garth Vincent cared for. An instinct towards alliance with some one who loved him, and to whom he for years had shown steadily that kindness that he so stoutly repudiated.

Katharine's untiring and often successful effort to veil her apprehension of the ugliness of her situation—his sometimes acquiescence in the veiling, oftener silent laughter, occasional comment, half-savage, wholly coarse—they were neither of them strangers to any of these things. She had shown that she could forgive him things unpardonable. She had not only come under the harsh spell, she could believe that she had abated somewhat of the harshness. Although he was as ready as ever to denounce delicacy as 'sentimental rot'; as ready when she rewarded some concession on his part by saying 'you are good,' to declare he didn't believe in 'goodness,' no nor in honesty, nor in anything under the sun but self-interest (suddenly upon that text, finding tongue, and sparing her no sordid example he could cite), in despite of all this, his speech, she told herself, was less uncouth of late, and even his manners better.

But he had not been able to eschew the malicious pleasure to be expected of a woman's jealousy of telegrams signed 'Nelly'—nor amusement at the notion of Katharine Dereham, who lived ostrich-like with her head in the sand, being brought suddenly to face the prospect of some of Vincent's people appearing at High Winston.

She had not intended it so, but the effect of her evident interest in Leonard, cost the boy a bidding to the country. The thought that Vincent wanted to keep even his sick little step-brother out of her life chagrined her even more than the fear of 'eyes' had made her shrink. Was he afraid this child would tell her something she was not to know?

* * * * *

The next week-end Vincent wired that he was going to Cornwall. No explanation, no regret. No letter following. Silence, and a bundle of papers addressed in his hand. More reviews. As if they were to make up!

No word all the week. None even on the Friday. Late

Saturday evening as she sat alone, a noise of horse's hoofs beating on the gravel. A crunch and swish. A vehicle had stopped. Could it be . . . so late? She ran to the front door. It was open. Vincent was paying a cabman from the station.

She stood back in the shadow till he came in, flung down his hat and gloves and stripped off his top-coat.

She noticed, as she stood half behind the door, how he drew his hand across his eyes, like one who tries to see clearer in a mist—and he stood listening a second with head turned to the drawing-room.

She moved silently out of the shadow, like a deeper shadow herself, and put her arm softly round his neck. He turned with a start and a recoiling. She felt it so curious, so terrible, that after all that had passed, his first impulse should be the defensive, that she drew away her arm and led the way into the pleasant lamp-lit room, saying coldly, 'I didn't mean to startle you.' It was the first time that she had volunteered a caress—it was his tired movement of the hands that prompted her.

'Have you dined?' she said stopping.

'Yes,' he answered, brusquely, pushed past her to an arm-chair and dropped into it. How tired he looked! She longed to make him come to the sofa, longed to take his head in her lap, to comfort him—remembered that action of instinctive withdrawal in the hall and sat motionless, expressionless in her corner. At such a time the delicate white face could wear a look almost hard, and singularly aloof. He glanced at her once or twice, out of half-shut eyes. The minutes passed.

'I'm going to bed,' he said, jumping up at last. 'Dog-tired. Good-night.'

'Good-night,' and he went up stairs.

He slept the greater part of the next day—and then went off to ride alone. Katharine strayed about the house with a feeling of suddenly being a stranger there—a person wholly without rights and now unsure of welcome.

What had happened? Something, plainly. Probably something to do with his profession—but from time to time she stabbed her aching heart with the wonder: had his mood anything to do with a woman? Had he in this last fortnight come to know someone who—— But she would not altogether admit the

possibility of that. No, it was some professional worry. . . . But in that case why did he not tell her?

Ah, he didn't trust her. That, at least, was true beyond the hazard of a doubt. She was an outsider to his life—*that* was the essence of her disgrace. Not lack of the legal tie, lack of confidence. *That* degraded her.

He went back to town in the evening having hardly spoken, save a moody word or two at meals.

Her effort to veil the ugliness in her position broke down completely. 'Oh, I am punished, well punished,' she said to herself with tearless, burning eyes. 'I have tried, and I have failed. And I must bear it. But not here. I cannot sit here alone with my failure—still less read weekly comment on that failure in his face.'

What should she do? To go, at all events—to go! the painful need was mounting to a passion.

A sense of dizziness and turmoil overwhelmed her. Here in the silence and Spring sweetness of the country, she felt all the affrighted bewilderment of the rustic caught in the street traffic of a great city, deafened by the roar, unnerved by the myriad danger.

The thing that had overtaken her was a commonplace in irregular living, and yet as easily console the small-pox patient by pointing out how he had put himself within infection's range, as for Katharine Dereham to say to herself, this was what inevitably happened. For she could say, that was not true. There were cases—few, of course, but some—where the relation lasted. Others where the woman—especially your woman of education and independence—where she it was, who tired first. That view was not so commonly presented to the world, but real life stories had ended so. For Katharine, the older, humbler version, of the woman who cared not less but more. 'Oh, I ought to have guessed! I ought to have known! If not before—from that first time he kissed me. I should have fled away from him as I would from a house on fire.'

Again Friday went by without him. Again late Saturday brought him back—more like himself, that is, more like his better, happier self. She longed to yield and soften to his mood, but her heart was over heavy for the task. 'Before he leaves me this time, no, before ten o'clock to-night, I will speak . . . I will say that I must go.' But it was hard to find the moment—

harder still the strength. She had to flog her failing spirit, saying: 'Other women, that woman most of all, against whose ghost I've striven, she would cling fast, no matter at what cost to personal dignity—barnacle-like such women fastened on men's lives . . .' Oh! it made her hot to think that her own feeling hitherto had blinded her: he may have expected before, those words she found it so hard to bring out—he may have found his patience taxed.

Ah, the whole thing was ugly, ugly.

* * * * *

During dinner she talked constantly, like one nervously on her guard, and frightened at what might leap into a pause. She told him stories and made him laugh in that queer silent way of his—but he kept an eye on her; quick to feel the something unusual in the air.

In the drawing-room she ignored the dogs, and moved restlessly about, still talking. Presently she heard him grumbling:

'Somebody's taken away my pipe.'

'Why, there's a cartload here!'

'But the one I want——'

She drew it out from behind a Chinese box.

'This the one?'

'Let's see?' He never stirred.

She took it to him—holding it gingerly. 'It smells horrid!'

'No it doesn't.' He took it in his left hand, and with the right he pulled her towards him. She stiffened. 'Come here—let's look at you.' The scarlet flew into her face as she drew away.

He felt for his tobacco-pouch, saying slyly: 'You've got your old colour back. It seems to suit you down here.'

She winced, then took her courage in her hands. 'I think with you, my cure is complete.' More the something in her voice than in the words arrested his attention.

He looked at her steadily while he filled the pipe.

Her throat felt dry, but she forced out the words: 'I think I'd better go back to town.'

He struck a vesta—held the flame to the pipe's brown bowl, pulled a breath or two, watched the tobacco shreds catch and glow, flung the match in the grate and crossed his legs. Not till then did he speak, and what he said was: 'All right.'

BOOK IV

GARTH

CHAPTER I

SHE did not know until that moment, that down deep in her heart lived the hope, the expectation even, of some outburst on his part of anger and surprise when she should have found the strength to speak of parting.

But only a lowering of the eyes, and those words of ready acquiescence: 'All right.'

That, the sum of what he had to say at prospect of her dropping out of his life—*that*, all he had of regret or of common human kindness . . . a black look in the fire and, 'All right.'

Turk got up and stood before her, saying quite plainly: 'Biscuits.'

'I must get you some, doggie.' Hastily she caught at the excuse.

Leaving Vincent there with his all-compensating pipe, she carried upstairs her humiliation and her aching heart, her tears that no summoning of pride would keep behind her eyes. She locked her door and flung herself sobbing on the bed. She had thought that she had stored up strength enough to go. She saw now that she had counted on his softening—his realizing how he would miss her, his begging her to stay—on different, worthier terms. But no. 'All right' and a level look in the fire.

A faint noise in the dressing-room. She hushed her sobbing to listen. Was it the maid? The next moment Vincent beside the bed, saying, 'What are you crying about?'

'I'm not crying,' returned a muffled voice. He bent down.

She smelt his smoky breath. He tried to lift her face out of the pillow.

‘Don’t touch me!’ she cried with sudden passion.

His own face impulsively darkened as he released her. He walked to the dressing-table, to the door, and back to the bed again, where he stood straight, angry, looking down.

‘When do you want to go?’

‘Directly. The first possible moment.’

In a fury he took hold of her shoulder, and forced her to turn her tear-stained face to the light. The sight of it seemed to reassure him, but he said roughly: ‘Look here—have I treated you so badly?’

‘No.’

‘Well, if I had treated you badly, what could you do more than want to rush off at a moment’s notice like this?’

‘Waiting won’t make it—make it——’ Her voice failed.

‘I’ve got to go to the West of England again in two or three weeks; wait till then.’

‘*No!*’ she said it with an outraged sense that every word showed more ruthlessly how little it all meant to him—he had got used to her, was ready to detain her here a few weeks longer, till he too had to be away, and so the ‘break’ he made quite easy. He was scowling down at his watch-chain.

‘I told you you wouldn’t be able to stand it here,’ he said.

‘It is true. I am not able to stand it.’

The door bell. A telegram, of course, for no one ever called.

Vincent still stood, lost in thought, examining his watch-chain link by link. Voices downstairs. Men’s voices. The house-keeper’s raised in quavering excitement. The barking of the dogs.

‘Don’t you think you’d better go——’ began Katharine.

‘Why?’

‘And see who it is.’ But still he stood there. A fear caught hold of Katharine lest it should be someone for her—Bertie, or Blanche, or even Craybourne.

Anton crossed her mind. Suppose it *was* he!

As the seconds passed and the sounds continued, she felt every instant the more sure. Yes, it was Anton, down there in the hall. He was come to take her away. And in the very nick of time! But even as she said this to herself, behold, the mere thought had

thrown her back again upon Garth Vincent. She had the impulse to creep into his arms and beseech him to let her stay—'for always.'

Still the sounds. Hark! Was that a child's voice? She got up, brushed her handkerchief again across her eyes, and, leaving Vincent leaning against the foot of the bed, deep in some disturbing thought, she stole out upon the landing and bent over the banisters.

It seemed as if a discussion was going on between men about some luggage. Now a clear young voice was saying: 'No I won't have anything brought in, till I've seen them.'

And Mrs. Jackson remonstrating: 'They doos go out for walks o' moonlight nights, and sometimes they doosn't get back till late.' It was then the little parlourmaid glanced up and said: 'Oh, there's Mrs. Vincent, now.'

Katharine went slowly down. In the angle of the lower hall, half surrounded by the dogs, a pale little boy sat on the oaken settle; a man stood near carrying a dressing-case and rug. The cabman waited at the open door, and the High Winston servants were respectfully drawing back, upon sight of the lady coming down.

Katharine kept her eyes fixed on the slim little figure upon the settle. The boy looked up. Hurriedly fitting a crutch under his arm with help of the man, he had pulled himself on his feet. As he stood there, half shy, half reassured, it seemed to Katharine as if, into this house that she was leaving, he had come unbidden, unlooked for, like all Fate—come to bring definite good or definite evil—which? she asked of the little white face with its grave grey eyes; of the square forehead with the thick red-brown hair growing low; of the mouth unnaturally firm for one so young—of the air that animated all, an air of character dashed with caprice. What are you come to bring? Shall I be humiliated before this child, or shall I be lifted up?

The boy had been staring at her with all his eyes. Katharine, pausing an instant on the stair, called up, 'Garth! Garth, your little brother is here,' and then ran down.

The boy held out a hand. She took it warmly. 'Did you telegraph? We never got it. Garth didn't know—Garth!' He appeared at the top of the stair.

'Hello!' called up the young visitor eagerly.

'What are you doing here?' said Vincent coming slowly down.

The young eyes searched first his step-brother's unwelcoming face, and then Katharine's. While still he looked from one to the other, 'I'm afraid you hate it?—me coming like this?' he said.

'You've no business,' began Vincent harshly, while Katharine involuntarily moved nearer the unbidden guest—'no business to be scouring the country alone.'

'Garth!' Katharine turned suddenly and laid a hand on Vincent's arm.

'I wasn't alone. I brought West along,' said the boy very crestfallen, looking over his shoulder at the man-servant—'I thought you . . . you'd like it.'

'Well, I don't!' said Vincent roughly.

Only by an effort did Katharine prevent herself from expostulating.

The tears sprang up in the child's grey eyes, but manfully he kept them back. 'Of course I didn't know you had got married, or I——'

'What I've done has nothing to do with it,' said the other even more angrily. 'When I want you here, I tell you so.'

'You mustn't stand.' Katharine laid an arm gently round the young shoulder with a motion to draw the boy down upon the settle—torn between a wish to help him, and a fear lest championship from her should not only complicate her last difficult hours here, but do the child's cause harm.

There are certain people entirely capable of being kind, who are ready to resent being prompted to kindness. She realized Vincent was one.

The boy had swallowed his tears, as, with his servant's help, he sat down, rattling the crutch while a slight spasm of pain flitted across his face. 'You—you've usually been glad to see me.'

'And so he is, really,' Katharine reassured him under her breath.

'I suppose your mother told you to come,' said Vincent.

'No. She—she doesn't know about it,' answered the boy miserably. 'She won't like it, either.'

'Garth!' Katharine burst out, 'you *mustn't* be unkind.'

But already upon being satisfied that his step-mother had not prompted the move, Vincent had been appeased.

'Oh, well,' he mumbled, half turning away, 'now that you're here——'

The boy looked up quickly.

'You *know* I wouldn't have come if I'd understood.'

'Understood what?' demanded Vincent, as sharply as before.

'Why——' He looked at Katharine, and seemed to take heart. A little smile flickered round the mature, firm mouth. 'I was most awfully surprised when Mrs. Jackson told me you'd got married.'

Silence. Katharine held her breath. In a more collected moment she would have known even Vincent would be incapable of explaining to this child, but now her feeling was of one who escapes a danger closely skirted, when she heard the harsh voice saying: 'Did you expect me to consult you?'

The boy laughed at that, nervously, but with returning spirits. 'Well—people's family usually hear about it, don't they?'

'I haven't got a family.'

The boy looked down, abashed.

Katharine took his hand, and as he raised his eyes to her face she smiled, and gave a little nod, as much as to say: '*We* know he doesn't mean that.'

'Well, anyhow,' said the intruder, 'I believe it's a piece of luck for me as well as for you.'

'What is?'

'That you're married.' He hesitated, remembering the recent shock to his anticipations: 'Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't believe *she* means to send me away.'

Katharine glanced hurriedly at Garth, and saw a look in his face that told her the boy's cause was safe.

'Oh, has *she* asked you to stay?' He was laughing his silent laugh, as Katharine left the settle to speak to the housekeeper, the only one of the servants who had ventured to remain. Even that privileged person had discreetly withdrawn inside the dining-room door. Katharine heard from her that Master Leonard always had the little octagon room.

'Then have it got ready, please.'

Vincent had gone out to give orders about the trunks and the invalid chair. 'And you must be hungry,' said Katharine, coming back into the hall.

'I oughtn't to be,' returned the boy, watching her with attentive eyes,—'but I believe I am.'

'Of course you are. Come in here. It won't take them long to get you something——' She led the way into the dining-room, and at the door looked back, expecting to see him following on his crutch. What she did see was that Vincent, having made fast the front-door, came back to the settle, just behind the servant. The man, having deposited rug and dressing-case at the foot of the stair, had returned, and was bending down as if to lift the boy. Leonard drew back, then made a little friendly gesture of 'No, not you!' and held up his arms to Vincent. Without a word being exchanged, or on Vincent's part a look, he picked up his unbidden guest and carried him into the dining-room.

Ah, he does care!

The table was just as they had left it half an hour before. Hurriedly Katharine made a place ready and herself sat down beside the boy. Turk came squeezing in between them.

Katharine had watched with hidden tenderness not only how skilfully Garth had lifted, put down, and helped the cripple—but how practised all his service was. No new thing this, tacitly to make up for a rude reception. It was done with all the ease of long custom and all the gathered beauty of old kindness. The cripple had shrunk and set his face when the man-servant bent over him. He had given himself up to his step-brother with confidence and smiling. He was eating and talking away, now, as if no cloud had rested on his arrival, Vincent on his right, with an air of watchful content and a second pipe.

Presently, 'How long can I stay?' said Leonard.

Katharine rolled bread-crumbs on the cloth.

'Hum—oh,—we'll see,' returned Vincent, obviously at a loss.

'I'm not asking you. I'm asking her.'

Then, as Katharine made no instant answer, 'Well, how long should you think you can put up with him?' said Vincent maliciously, looking at her across the boy.

Katharine reached over the cloth for a far-away crumb, and gathered it solicitously into the little pile with the others.

'Perhaps she'd like to know me better before she decides,' said the small guest hastily, but his confident look had clouded.

'Oh, *I* wanted you to come before,' said Katharine.

'No! *Did* you?' he beamed. 'And mother never told me.'

'Where is your mother?' asked Katharine with suppressed anxiety.

'She's gone back to London.'

'Left you alone at St. Ives?' demanded Vincent.

'Oh, she had to go. They want her to be a chairwoman at a Primrose League something—and there were several very important things——'

'——dare say,' grunted Vincent. 'What put it into your head to come here?'

'Oh, you know that was in my head when you first came down to see me.'

'And I said you were to stay where you were.'

'Yes, but you promised to come back. And you didn't. Now I know why.' He laughed roguishly up at Katharine.

'When I promised to come back you were ill. When your mother wrote that you were all right——'

'Oh, of course,' interrupted the boy, with an old-fashioned air of that knowing all which forgives all,—'you couldn't leave—what am I to call you?'

'My name is Katharine.'

He leaned back in his chair, and took her in with an aspect of great satisfaction to himself. 'I never had a sister before. It's awfully jolly.' Vincent puffed out the smoke, and Katharine rolled bread. Then, as if in his old-fashioned way the child were wondering how things in general had impressed the new member of the family: 'Isn't this a nice kind of a place?'

'Yes, indeed,' assented Katharine.

'She don't think much of it,' muttered Vincent.

Katharine and the little guest exchanged understanding smiles. 'Of course, we both know Garth,' he telegraphed. Then aloud: 'And don't you rather like the pond?'

'Oh yes, and the big trees——'

'And the rooks,' added Vincent.

'Yes. Did you know there's stickle-backs in the little river?' said the boy eagerly.

'No—really?'

'Lots. Did you ever fish?'

'Oh yes,' responded Katharine with an enthusiasm that surprised herself.

'Now I think you'd better get to bed,' said Vincent, pushing back his chair.

'Oh, Garth,' said the boy, 'let's talk a little about fishing first.'

'No. But you can ask her to sing you one song before you——'

'Does she sing, *too* ?'

They all laughed.

It seemed to please something she had not suspected in Vincent, to show her off to this little member of his family.

He put Leonard into the arm-chair and opened the piano. Katharine sang one song after another upon the boy's imploring. Vincent seemed to forget he had said just 'one.'

When she had finished 'The Blackthorn and the Missel-thrush' Leonard clapped his hands. 'Why, that song might have been written in the lane between Matley Church and the Coxon's batch cottage——'

'That's where it was written,' says Vincent.

'How do you know?' laughed Katharine.

'*Was* it written there?' asked Leonard, mystified.

'You remember where the hill goes up sharp into the wood?' said Katharine.

'Rather. That's near our old picnic place, isn't it?' Vincent nodded. 'I've spent three birthdays here,' announced the boy.

'When is the birthday due?'

'Twelfth of May. That was a jolly picnic you made last year,' he said to Vincent with charming guile.

'Who was there?' asked Katharine, and then regretted the question.

'Oh, me and Garth and Turk and Jackson, and the collies. We had awful fun, didn't we?'

Vincent nodded. Then, bending down over the grate to knock the ashes out of his pipe: 'I can't do it this year. I'm going away.' Then, in the pause, he glanced suddenly at Katharine, who was closing the piano. 'But *she* might, if you got on the good side of her.'

Leonard looked eagerly at the lady's grave face. As she said nothing: 'I expect it would be a lot of trouble for her.'

'No. It would be delightful,' rejoined Katharine hurriedly. 'But the twelfth is a good way off.'

'Only three weeks,' said Vincent.

'Three weeks and two days,' amended Leonard.

'She hates it here,' said Vincent, putting his pipe in the rack. 'All rot about the pond and the rooks! Don't even care about horses, *really*. Just like your mother. Dying to get back to town.'

'Oh,' said Leonard.

'Don't believe all he says.' Katharine was smiling with a sense that tears were close behind. Garth must know perfectly how hard it was for her to go. Why did he want to torture her?

'It isn't true?' demanded Leonard quickly. 'You do like this place?'

'Well, if she does, you may get your picnic after all,' said Vincent, as he lifted the boy in his arms and carried him out—Turk close on his heels; for Turk knew well enough he was expected to sleep in the octagon room, too, when Master Leonard was at High Winston.

Yes, for that boy, at least, Garth Vincent cared! 'I'll come and say good-night in two or three minutes,' Katharine called after them.

But she stood exactly where they had left her till Vincent reappeared. 'Oh!' she started out of her reverie: 'I was going to put out the lights. You needn't have come back.'

'Yes, I need.'

Speaking absently, while she turned out the tall standard nearest her, 'What for?' she said.

'Why, for you.'

Had he divined her determination, made in the hopeless grief of the earlier evening, to effect the break that night?—to make it complete and final, since come it must. Bitter as that hour had been, it had come to her nobly attended, with courage and with resolution. But where were these high companions now? Had they gone gravely out, when Leonard opened the door, admitting other influences in his train: compassion, and the natural drawing together of poor human folk, who need help and who bring love? Certainly her sense of personal suffering

and humiliation had fallen far into the background, as she had stood there watching Vincent, skilled and strangely gentle, carrying the boy to bed.

Ah, very true, it was, he cared!

The sight had set other fancies stirring.

If it were her child——

Vincent put out the last light. Now the room was dark. She went into the hall, remembering vividly that she had meant to turn to him on the threshold and say good-night. What she *did* say was: 'I must go and see if Leonard has everything.'

'I've done that.' He turned out the lower hall light and followed her closely up the stair. She went on, with the radiance from above catching in her hair, and with no word, but a breathless sense of his having heard the unspoken 'Good-night,' which was to say as well, Good-bye. At the head of the stair, she turned to go down the corridor to the octagon room. He stopped her abruptly with:

'Leonard's all right.'

'Oh—then I—I'll just say good-night to him.'

'I've said it for you. You can do it every night for the next three weeks—till I come back.' He stood a little impatiently, waiting for her. 'Leonard mustn't talk any more. He's excited enough as it is.' Then, drawing nearer and dropping his voice: '*I've told him.*'

She opened her lips, and no sound came.

She leaned against the wall, feeling faint with disgust. Little or nothing of what filled her heart was written in her face, but a sudden pallor had wiped out the 'old colour' as clean as a sponge may wipe a slate. He had done the incredible.

'So,' she said quite low, 'you have told the child.' It was the end.

'I ought to have waited till morning. He's such a rum little chap. Takes all that kind of thing frightfully seriously.' A sick and dizzy feeling made her lean hard against the wall a moment. 'Most boys wouldn't care tuppence, you know.' She stood up straight—looked right and then looked left. Where should she take refuge for the night? 'But Leonard's always been poring over books. And he's never seen a real live poet before.'

'A poet?' she said scarce audibly.

'Yes, a genius, you know,' and he grinned as at some capital joke.

'You . . . then, what you've been telling Leonard is——'

'You don't really mind?' She detected a suspicion of anxiety under his amusement. 'He's sure to know some time.'

'What was it you told him?'

'That it was you wrote "The Blackthorn and the Missel-thrush"—and all the rest.'

'Oh.'

Vincent was standing under the light, hands in pockets, silently chuckling. 'You ought to have seen his eyes. Never knew such a rum little chap.'

Did he guess how changed and gentle his own eyes were when he talked about the boy? Indeed, indeed he cared!

'What did Leonard say?'

'Said he felt very "queer and heavenly" while you were singing!' Vincent interrupted himself with a smothered burst of laughter. 'And I explained it.'

'Oh? How did you do that?'

'Told him it was no doubt because you were what they call a genius.' His teeth were shining in a silent laugh, as he lifted up his hand to find the screw that should turn out the light.

'I'm *not* a genius!' she said rather hotly, resenting being exploited to amuse a child.

'Well, that's what I read in the papers,' he persisted.

'Whatever I am, you make me wish I was somebody else.'

He dropped his uplifted hand, and looked at her. Her voice had had a queer ring in it.

'Wish you were somebody else? Who?'

'Some little white-faced boy—who can't walk without a crutch.'

'Why?'

'I think then, perhaps, you'd——'

'What?'

She shook her head, with eyes slowly filling.

'Go in,' he said; 'I'm turning out the light.'

CHAPTER II

It was twice as long as Vincent had stipulated before High Winston saw him again. Katharine wondered sometimes at her patience. But in truth she had hugged close the soft green days in lane and wood, following Leonard's chair, or sitting by the rush-fringed river, or under the late-come leafage of the oaks, beside the boy Garth loved, and who in turn had made an Abgott of the man.

They talked of a thousand things, those two, but of nothing so much as Garth.

'If I had not loved him before,' she would reflect, 'Leonard would have made me.' Yet Leonard had small share in the Garth of those last hours, that memory dwelt on, doating. He had exacted a promise from her, an odd enough thing for him to do. 'You won't go away, no matter what happens, before I get back?'

'No.'

'Not for a day?'

'Not an hour,' she had said, adding, 'How anxious you are about that boy.'

'About—— Oh, Leonard. Well, you've promised, haven't you?'

'Yes, I've promised.'

And so she stayed on, strangely content, living, as such blinded ones may do, on an all-sufficing memory. For whatever went before, whatever might come after, he had loved her in those last hours.

'I've been so afraid you would be wanting to go up to town,' Leonard had said, gratefully, as the time drew to a close. 'I

never had such a nice visit here before. It's always been rather lonely in the middle of the week.'

'But this time you've had so little of your brother. I'm afraid you miss Garth.'

'Not so much as I used to when I was all alone here, with only West and the Jacksons, from Sunday night till Friday.'

'I suppose you had—visitors, sometimes?'

'No, Garth hates 'em!' Then with face grown suddenly grave: 'Mother wants to come down on Friday.'

Katharine had often wondered in what fashion she figured in the weekly letters exchanged between Mrs. Vincent and her son. But no word had yet enlightened her, and she could not have questioned the child.

'I telegraphed to Garth about it,' he said after a thoughtful little pause.

She looked up. 'No answer yet?'

'No. I'll have it to-night, I should think.'

When it came, he gave it at once to Katharine.

'Say no room this week. Next if she likes.—GARTH.'

Ah! That must mean he was coming—Garth himself! At last! But did it mean, too, that he was bringing people?

Mrs. Vincent must have resented the message, for she wired back that her son was to return to her at once, or she would come and fetch him.

'You see she doesn't know there's anybody here,' Leonard apologized for her,—'and she thinks it isn't very nice of Garth.'

'Your mother imagines you are quite alone all this time?'

'Oh, with West, you know, and the Jacksons—and Garth at the week-ends.'

'Then you haven't said——' she meant to add: 'that Garth hasn't been here for six weeks?' but she could not even to that extent question the boy. She got up hastily.

Leonard was looking at her. 'I haven't told mother the great news—about you. I think, from what Garth said, he wants to do that himself.'

Very unwillingly the boy went back to town early the next morning. Katharine's sorrow at his going was swept out of

existence by the wave of eager joy that rushed upon her at getting a note from Vincent—the first that had ever come.

'Dear K.,—Back to-morrow by the 6.22. Send a wire to say you will be at the station.—G. V.'

Was this his way to bar all chance of being taken by surprise? Did he, in spite of Leonard's frequent, though never-answered letters, full of Katharine, as she knew, and of their days together—did he doubt that she would hold out to the very end of a time so much longer than he had given her any hint of? Her answer was simply: *I will meet you.—K.*

And she did.

'I'm afraid you'll be disappointed when you hear——'

'What?' he interrupted sharply, pausing as he was about to get into the dog-cart.

'Leonard's mother sent for him. He went back yesterday.'

'Oh, I knew that.'

Jackson from the back seat presented an accumulated budget of the happenings in stable, kennel, and field.

They dined out on the lawn, an arrangement Vincent scoffed at, but obviously enjoyed. And they were gayer than ever they had been together. As they strolled about afterwards, Katharine, too full of joy in his return either to make, or even to remember, 'plans' or any form of taking thought for the morrow, listened contentedly to Garth's observations on the tremendous change a few weeks makes in the country at this time of the year; heard him with gladness saying after a little pause: 'Leonard seems to have enjoyed himself down here——' and then, upon his sudden halting at the hedge-gate, heard all her happiness come crashing in ruin about her ears upon his adding: 'It was nice of you not to go till I got back.'

Not to go *till*——

She stood motionless, while steadily he looked at her. Nothing in life had ever hurt her as his eyes did at that moment.

'You forgot I promised,' she found voice to say—*'promised you I would wait till you got back, before I——'*

'I know.'

'And now I suppose I can go?'

'For how long?' he demanded.

'For how long?'

'Yes.'

The ghost of the Other Woman nerved her. *She* had come back, then! . . . But Katharine would never be among the 'again-goers.'

'You don't think I'm going for good?'

'No.'

'You think I couldn't bear that?'

'Why should you?'

'Do you know of any reason why I shouldn't . . . try to bear it?'

'Yes.'

Lightning-quick, a sense within her of barring the door with both hands against hope—hope too long illusive to be let in now. She was thankful she had not taken that brusque 'Yes!' too simply, for straightway he was qualifying it, '—unless I'm much mistaken'—hesitated and looked at her while she shrank, not knowing why she did, for the dark look was glowing. In spite of telling herself that she hoped for nothing any more, his pause, the sense of waiting, affected her like some intolerable physical pain. She broke the silence rudely.

'I thought you realized, I've only waited, to keep my promise. But of course I'm going to-morrow.'

'You *can't* go!'

'What makes you think that?'

She saw him glance sharply over the hedge, was herself vaguely conscious of two heads appearing some yards away above the flat, clipped top. Garth rested his hand on the gate and leaned towards her, speaking his next words as low as if they two had been in a room full of people.

'No!' she cried.

His eyes were lit. '*Yes!*—unless I'm very much mistaken.'

Quite near now, above the hedge, those two heads coming swiftly. Jackson with one of the farm hands, both bicycling. The bodyless apparition glided along on the top of the close-clipped laurel, like an illusion produced by some juggler, but no stranger, at that moment, than any other trick played by the arch-juggler, life.

‘Good-evening, ma’am. Evening, sir.’

The two heads went tobogganing by, on the downward slanting hedge. Still she stood where this new thing had found her, stood there in the failing light, fathoms deep in silence, utterly without motion, or even changing look, yet feeling herself to be blown along by the sudden-veering wind of Destiny, with a too great momentum for any thinking, or seeing, or even clear and final feeling.

Out of the blackness of the chaos in her mind, one thought was rising clear: after all, the relation she had borne to this man could not now, in the eternal nature of things, be episodic, soon ended, and overlaid by the multitudinous littleness of life. That last disgrace of triviality was not to cling mocking about the story. The great abiding link between man and woman was established between him and her. A thrill went through her at the realization: something of him would be always with her till she died. The thought offered sanctuary. He might treat her as he liked, might go where he would, this with care and fostering should abide. This much, out of her love and suffering, she had won.

And she hugged the thought; seeing quick glimpses of life abroad, in seclusion, and in earnest living for the sake of —

Then, consciousness of that figure leaning on the gate, those eyes, came pricking through her lulling dream of recompense.

She turned abruptly, and began to retrace her steps through the shrubbery to the house. But he was at her side.

‘Well!’ She answered nothing. ‘What are you going to do?’

‘I don’t yet know.’

He put out his hand and took her arm, forcing her to keep his pace. ‘No, tell me.’ As she walked on, her fair head held up, shining still in the fainter light, he said: ‘A man and a woman who spend their lives together ought to have children.’

‘Spend their lives together?’ she echoed under her breath.

‘Yes. At first I wasn’t sure. I hadn’t seen enough of you, you hadn’t seen enough of me, to know what chance we had of getting on together.’

(Gods! how commonplacely he pulled her passion down!) ‘And now, as you begin to feel sure, I begin to doubt,’ she said.

Another man would have stopped to remonstrate, and try to recover ground. He went headlong on: ‘Besides, women are kittle cattle. You think they’re all right, and they’re——’

'—all wrong?' she suggested faintly.

'Rotten!'

She tore her arm out of his hold, but he caught her wrist. Instead of apology: 'I've seen too much,' he said roughly. He stood still by the garden seat, obliging her to do the same. As she made no rejoinder, 'I won't run risks,' he threw in. Silence. He let go her arm. With release from his rough sustaining, a faintness fell upon her. She dropped upon the garden seat.

'Well?' he said, waiting.

'That night'—at last she was bringing out the breathless words—'that night, just before Leonard came, when I said I must go—you hadn't made up your mind then.'

'Yes, I had.'

'But when I said I was going, you answered, "All right."'

'Well? I didn't blame you for not wanting to be buried at High Winston for ever.'

Then as Katharine sat silent, throwing back this light upon the past, he went on, 'I *should* have been thick-witted if I hadn't found out by that time.' He left the sentence as if he had rounded it to the fullest completeness of expression.

'Found out what?'

'What I wanted.'

'You didn't think of what I wanted.'

'I supposed I knew. That was what made me angry! To find out that *you*, of all women——' He kicked a stone out of the path, the same expression on his face that he had worn that night when he stood beside the bed, saying: 'Look here! Have I treated you so badly?'

'What was it made you angry?' she persisted.

'Why, to find out that you should imagine you could go—*for good*.'

'That surprised you?'

He looked at her. '*You!* with all your fine notions!'

She dropped her eyes.

'Of all women, *you!* Just as if——'

'Just as if——?'

'Oh, you understand me well enough.'

'I'm only beginning to, Garth.'

CHAPTER III

THEY were married so quietly, that a never dissipated vagueness existed in the general mind, as to when and where, they had gone through civil form, or religious ceremony.

* * * * *

It was a few minutes before five o'clock, when Paul Dalberg, F.R.S., etc., etc., Lecturer on Pathological Chemistry, author of a world-renowned work on 'Assimilation,' turned his broad back upon William George Frederick Cavendish Bentinck, and, in the act of lifting Garth Vincent's knocker, was accosted by another visitor. The fair, good-looking Professor turned, and greeted with animation, a red-cheeked girl of twenty-six or so, who stood on the step breathing quickly after a brisk walk, and presenting a somewhat masculine, if undeniably handsome, effect in her ruthlessly neat attire. When the butler opened the door, she cut him short with:

'It is not a bit of use, Staines, to say they're not at home. I am to see Dr. Vincent at five. Though I *did* think at first,' she added to her fellow-visitor on their way to the drawing-room, 'that I couldn't have read his note right. It's such an unusual time for Garth's hale and hearty acquaintance to get speech of him.'

'Oh, he'd see *you* at any time. But I suppose men do come home to tea when they're just married.'

She laughed: 'Is it observation of that fact that has deterred you——'

'Oh,' retorted Dalberg, 'it isn't *I* who have been deterred.'

'Don't pretend you ever in your life seriously contemplated—— What's that?'

He was unfolding a piece of music, his eyes still on the girl: 'Never seriously contemplated tea every day in my own house?'

Sydney Ford looked at the music over his shoulder. 'That would be to darken too many lives. Women have spoiled you for woman.'

'I've heard that said with more reason——'

'Impossible for more reason to exist.'

'——said with more reason, I repeat, of your cousin. Yet he has succumbed.'

'Garth had only his profession, you see.' Sydney turned away and sat down. 'You're protected by your hobby.'

'The more exposed,' Dalberg smiled.

'It's quite true, being a lover of good music, and a maker of it, makes you welcome in places where your exalted achievements in science wouldn't do much for you.'

'Happily they aren't mentioned—or even known.'

'Oh yes, they're known, in a hazy way,' she insisted. 'Just enough to give piquancy to your being so musical and so——'

'——so——?'

'Oh, being as ready to smile with, as at women.'

"At?" No, really!' protested the Professor.

'To smile at us,' the girl jeered good-humouredly, 'is almost the duty of anybody at once so scientific and so notoriously a favourite of the fair.'

He laid his pince-nez on the mantelpiece, and began seriously: 'You don't understand——'

'Perfectly.' She got up and began to walk about with a restless air. 'Smiling at us is your way of conveying: "My head is not turned, you observe." Perhaps a sop to men less in women's good graces. A way of assuring them'—she caught up his pince-nez and hunched her shoulders, imitating him:—"My dear fellow, your loss is, in my estimation, trifling." Laughing, she laid down the pince-nez. 'Now, if it had been *you*! But can you imagine anything more comic than Garth's marrying a poetess?'

Paul Dalberg looked at the door and lowered his voice. 'I can imagine nothing more tragic than her expecting to make a success of marrying Garth.'

'How long do you suppose it will last?'

He shrugged.

'It will be curious,' she said reflectively, 'curious to watch.'

A little pause, and then she laughed again. 'Garth and a poetess!'

'After all, she isn't a poetess to hurt.'

'Oh, isn't she? Well, I'm not literary, thank God, so I can't pronounce; but one hears that the critics are going about saying there hasn't been since Christina Rossetti——'

'That's all true, I believe.'

It was as if she made an effort to conceal her disappointment. 'Oh, really!'

'——what I mean is, she is first and foremost a charming woman.'

'So! She's captured you already! Well, it's not a bad beginning.'

'What do *you* make of her?' asked Garth's only intimate friend with a puzzled air.

'I haven't seen her yet. Apparently you have.'

'Several times,' said the Professor.

'Several times!' echoed the girl quickly. 'Why, how long have they been married?'

'Well, they've been back in town ten days.'

'I don't believe Mrs. Richard knows that,' she said reflectively.

'I fear Mrs. Richard knows very little about the whole thing.'

'When I hear people rail at Garth's vile temper, I always think of Mrs. Richard.' Sydney sat down again. 'I consider his forbearance with that step-mother of his——'

'I don't want to detract from his credit, but there can't be a question of breaking with Mrs. Richard.'

'You don't mean because she was his father's wife?'

'I mean because she's a pensioner,' said Garth's friend. 'Most of all because she's a person who has ready under her hand a potent means of revenge.'

'In Leonard . . .?'

'In Leonard,' repeated Dalberg.

'There's no doubt it's the greatest happiness the poor child has——coming here.'

'It has been Garth's greatest happiness. I've sometimes watched the three together. You could almost see the mental process by which Garth arrives at the conclusion that, for the sake

of that sick child, he will moderate his transports of dislike to the mother.'

'Moderate them to a certain extent?' laughed the girl as at some diverting recollection. 'Yes, although there's never been a time when Mrs. Richard approved of her step-son, she's done what she could to keep him in the family.' Miss Ford got up with an air of impatience to look at the clock. 'Well! at all events, the long suspense on the part of her goggle-eyed sisters is ended.'

'Is theirs the only suspense that's ended?'

'And to think there's a popular theory that jealousy is a feminine complaint!'

'It is no news to you that I am jealous,' said Dalberg, coming nearer.

Sydney evaded him, going to the window for a moment. As she stood there, looking out: 'Why do you suppose she married him?' asked the girl.

'You don't think it's impossible she should care about him.'

'The kind of woman they describe—it doesn't seem very likely. In any case it's a rather funny ending to her long romantic attachment to Prince Anton, that people used to talk about,' she turned back to the fire and to the man standing there. 'Some even said——'

'Some talked nonsense.'

'How do *you* know?' she demanded sharply.

'Well, I have my view. She's the sort of person—wait till you see her.'

'She *must* have laid herself out!' Sydney smiled significantly.

'On the contrary,' said Professor Paul, 'she snubbed me rather.'

'I take leave to doubt that she snubbed Prince Anton. The standards of the people she's lived among are frankly cynical. One is told that anything (with them) is possible so long as a certain outward decency is preserved.'

'However that may be, I shouldn't call her typical of her class.'

'Romantic and that kind of thing?' asked the girl, a certain hardness in her voice.

'I mean that if not virtue (which is a form of romance)——'

'Oh, for shame!'

'If not virtue,' he persisted, 'pride keeps that kind of woman

from—— She is imaginative, she is sensitive, in short, she has the great preoccupation of being an artist.'

'Oh!' the scorn of the athletic young woman was unconcealed, 'you mean her poems?'

'Perhaps I mean her soul.'

'Why, Paul, you know perfectly well you don't believe in anything so old-fashioned.'

'How do you know I'm not converted?' he laughed.

The pompous butler came in with a table, followed closely by a maid with a tea-tray.

'I really must stay and see this woman,' said Sydney mockingly, in a half whisper.

At the sound of Garth's voice outside the maid started and rattled the tea-things. The man-servant dropped his magisterial air and ran out. 'Yes, sir. Not ten minutes ago, sir,' they heard him saying, as Garth came in with letters and telegrams.

'Oh, you're here again, are you?' he said, nodding to Paul. He shook hands with his cousin, and tore open a second telegram.

'Your wife——' Sydney began.

'She'll be here in a minute. I've sent her to change her shoes.' A covert look passed between the two visitors.

'Is this the way you keep your appointments?' demanded the girl, as Vincent tore open another envelope.

He glanced up. 'Why, am I late?'

'I must have five minutes' talk with you,' she said, going a little nearer to him.

'What about?'

'That's what I've come to say.'

'Well, I've got five minutes;' he pulled out his watch.

'Could I see you downstairs? I want to consult you——'

Paul deposited the music on the piano, and took up his hat.

'What, *you* ill?' Vincent had said to the girl.

'No, it's about a friend of mine.'

'I must be off,' Paul put in. 'I only came to leave some music for your wife.'

'You needn't go. She'll be down in a minute.'

'I must—I'll be late now. Do you mind if I go this way?' Paul was escaping by the little back drawing-room.

'What's that for?' demanded Vincent as his friend vanished.

Oh, I see. Hear, rather,' as Mrs. Richard Vincent's high voice broke clearly on the silence, even before the servant opened the door:

'Mrs. Richard Vincent and Master Leonard;' the dignified Staines stood aside, as Mrs. Richard burst in, wasp-waisted and overdressed; resolutely juvenile in a picture hat.

'Oh, *you're* here,' she said to Vincent, stopping short in her career.

'Yes, this is where I live.'

She kissed Sydney with effusion, but kept her eye on her stepson. 'I fully intended to wait till you came in. I've something to say to you. But I should be greatly disappointed if I didn't see your wife *at last*.'

Garth made no answer, but as Leonard's chair was wheeled in, he went over and spoke to the boy, who looked round eagerly and whispered something. Before Garth had answered, the little fellow burst out: 'West? Now West's gone, without taking me to my place!'

'Have you got a place here?' said Garth. 'I didn't know that.'

The boy was obviously dashed, but, 'Yes,' he said, 'behind the tea urn, next to Katharine.'

'Well, as they're neither of them here——' began his stepbrother.

'You *know*,' Leonard appealed, 'you know where she likes to have me.' Then, gathering courage: 'She'll be very angry with you, if you don't do as she likes.'

Garth laughed and was wheeling the chair in place, as Katharine came in. She went straight to Leonard, but Mrs. Richard, not waiting to be presented, precipitated herself forward. 'So we meet at last,' she said in the strained London tea-party voice, and writhing her neck so that, despite the circumference of her hat, she could bring her face near enough to the new member of the family to kiss her on the cheek. Katharine disengaged herself without undue haste, while Garth interrupted the salutation by saying to his wife, 'You haven't changed!'

'Yes, I have.'

'Let me see. Put out your foot.'

'Why, you don't doubt me, do you?' Katharine laughed, ignoring his demand. 'Is this your cousin?'

'Yes.' He stared suspiciously down at Katharine's shoes. 'You were very quick about it.'

'I get tired of being driven upstairs every time I come in,' she returned, still smiling, 'so I keep shoes in the coat room.' He sat down in a chair by Leonard as the tea urn appeared. Above the lower interchange between Katharine and Sydney, Mrs. Richard's voice rose shrill: 'Well, it's been the greatest surprise,' she announced, seating herself and keeping her prominent eyes on Katharine. 'I suppose you know we'd all come to think of Garth as quite hopelessly wedded to bachelorhood?'

'Yes?' Katharine's eyes left her, passed over Sydney, and fell upon Leonard. 'Has Garth told you Turk half killed the Irish terrier on Sunday?'

'Oh, I was afraid——' lamented the boy, craning his head forward with excitement.

An animated conversation between the two, to which Mrs. Richard listened with a frank curiosity, in which neither Turk nor terrier could claim a share. Unblushingly she took stock of the new acquisition, her clothes, her ways, her looks from this point of view and from that. But the doggy conversation soon palled on Mrs. Richard. She had come not only to inspect her step-daughter-in-law, but strung up to the fearful joy of speaking her mind to Garth. The satisfaction imparted by the act of nailing a thesis on the temple door is not confined to your religious Reformer. Mrs. Richard held up the protest and drove the first nail smartly in.

'Of course you realize,' she turned briskly to her step-son with that smile that is no smile, but a mere showing of the teeth—'you realize that you have treated us all very shabbily.'

Katharine, in the act of pouring tea, glanced at Garth. He sat quite stolid and regarded his boots.

'Oh, I hope not,' said his wife, covering the pause for him, since his look denied the smallest intention of doing so for himself.

'It's very sweet of you to try to excuse him,' Mrs. Richard went on, still goggling and smiling in that inimical way of hers. 'But you must be intensely conscious of what I mean; even if it's too much for the masculine mind.'

The owner of that impediment to clear perception leaned on the sofa arm and spoke *sotto voce* to Sydney. Katharine, so far

from justifying expectation by seeming 'intensely conscious,' wore a look of vague surprise.

'But of course you've found out how Garth *loves* making a mystery,' said Mrs. Richard.

'Does he? Oh dear!'

'*Doesn't* he?' Mrs. Richard appealed to Sydney. That young lady, not waiting for her tea, had begun on bread-and-butter. It struck Katharine there was something wonderfully vigorous, 'athletic' even, in the way she ate it. 'Just wait,' pursued Mrs. Richard with a humorous air. 'It's nice of us to forewarn you, isn't it, Sydney? Oh, he carries it into the simplest things. You'll be out walking with him. He speaks to a man. "Who was that?" you say—quite innocently.' She caricatured Garth's frown: "'A friend of mine." "What's his name?" "You wouldn't know it." "Not if I never hear it, of course." "You *won't* hear it."—*that's* the kind of thing, isn't it, Sydney?'

'I'm surprised at you, Garth.' Katharine laughed a little wickedly.

'Paul Dalberg says—have you seen Paul?' demanded Mrs. Richard.

'He couldn't wait,' Garth explained shortly to his wife.

'Well, you will see him,' Mrs. Richard assured her. 'He's the one human being Garth *never* gets tired of. I wonder how you'll like him. *He* says that nobody who knows Garth had any right to be amazed. "It's just like him," he says, and if anybody understands Garth I suppose it's Paul Dalberg. But,' she dropped the humorous air, 'where it's a question of *marriage*—and a marriage, I may say, that he ought to be proud of—it's a different matter. It isn't fair to his wife.'

'Oh, his wife——' began that lady light-heartedly.

But she was interrupted. 'As I said to you in my letter, you must have thought it very singular and uncordial, that your husband's friends made no sign. But how *could* we?'

'I didn't misunderstand.'

'I assure you we knew nothing, absolutely nothing. Did we, Syd?'

'No.'

Leonard looked round the urn with a superior little air. 'I knew.'

'Fancy,' Mrs. Richard was growing more excited, 'fancy his not even——'

Garth jumped up, watch in hand, and asked about the hunting accident Sydney had had at Christmas.

As Mrs. Richard was about to resume, Katharine said with a conciliatory air: 'Yes, Garth *is* rather uncommunicative, as you say.'

'Uncommunicative! The Vincents,' Mrs. Richard paused to take in the group, Garth, Leonard, and Sydney, 'are every one of them as secretive as the Crawleys are frank.'

'The Crawleys?'

'You didn't know I was a Crawley?'

'I don't think—Garth is, as you say, rather uncommunicative.'

'Seriously,' Mrs. Richard appealed through his back to the better nature of the bridegroom, 'you can't imagine how awkward all this unnecessary secrecy has made it for us.' Garth turned half round, frowning. Mrs. Richard rushed on excitedly: 'Why for *weeks*, ever since it came out in fact——'

'A fortnight ago,' Sydney put in calmly.

'——I've been *bombarded* with questions! Nobody would have believed, I didn't know the answer to a single one of them.'

'No,' muttered Garth under his breath.

'You can't think what I felt like at the big Bazaar on Tuesday,' Mrs. Richard turned to Katharine for sympathy,—'under Royal Patronage, you know. My sisters and I had such a pretty stall with Lady O'Brian—Irish Industries, you know, great success. I'm going on there this afternoon to look over our bills and accounts—a *dear* person, Mora O'Brian: you must know her. But fancy all those people crowding round me at the Bazaar asking for particulars. Where the marriage had taken place and all that.'

Garth wheeled suddenly upon her. 'Didn't you tell them?'

Mrs. Richard gaped. 'How could I?'

'Why not?'

'Did you think you'd told us? Never once! You're the oddest creature! He'll be saying next that he invited us to the wedding,' she said to Sydney.

'I'd never go so far as that,' remarked her step-son.

'*What!*'

'Marriage should be private.'

'Oh, nonsense!' Mrs. Richard was still bewildered by the audacity of his first question. 'The fact is, you impose on my sense of family obligation. You know you could depend on my not giving you away to all those women.'

Garth's angry eyes leaped at her. 'Give me away?'

'Naturally I didn't admit publicly how badly you've treated us all. And when everybody asked, "Where were they married?" I said, "Oh, Ireland, of course."'

'How did you know?' said Garth, almost pleasantly.

'Then I was right!' Mrs. Richard triumphed. 'Well, I consider it a stroke of genius on my part.' Garth resumed his talk with Sydney, but it was plain that he kept an eye, if not an ear, for Mrs. Richard. She was saying with animation to Katharine: 'No, it wasn't, as I see you're thinking, our "Industries" that put Ireland in my head. Everybody knew you'd been out of England. Some said visiting relations. Your father's people I knew came from County Wicklow.'

'Yes.'

'I remember that because a cousin of mine married a cousin of yours.'

'Oh, who was that?'

'Mabel Denison, Captain Dereham White's second wife.'

'I don't think I ever——'

'But I'm sure you agree it was very extraordinary of Garth to——'

'I do agree that he's extraordinary.'

Sydney lowered her voice: 'Can't I see you downstairs?'

'You can tell me here what it is.' He shot a watchful glance over his shoulder towards Mrs. Richard, who was saying:

'At our M.A.B.Y.S. Committee meeting this very morning the Duchess of Worcester asked me how long you'd been married.'

'Oh, did she?' responded Katharine. 'She's rather an old friend of mine. So you see, Mrs. Vincent——'

'You must call me Nelly. Everybody calls me Nelly.'

'Since my old friends were not told, you see you were not the only one who——'

'The Duchess isn't in the family after all,' observed Mrs. Richard with dignity, as Garth half turned again, impatience darkening every feature. 'It was so very awkward being asked

that, by the Duchess, before the whole Committee. What *could* I say? I didn't know.'

A slight pause, and then: 'You shouldn't let a little thing like that stand in your way,' said Garth at his deadliest.

'Well, I didn't! How long have they been married?' said I. 'Oh, for some time.'

'Right again! You're a clever woman after all,' he turned to Sydney once more.

'After all!'

'While I think of it,' he threw over his shoulder, 'if you and Leonard care to go down to Winston, you can have the house for July. Yes, go on,' he said to Sydney.

'Oh—thanks,' Mrs. Richard pulled herself together, 'August would suit us better.'

'No,' Garth burst out angrily, drawing away from Sydney. 'I told your friend, since she didn't like my treatment, she needn't send for me again.'

'It isn't that she doesn't like—it's only that you—you shatter her nerves. And she's afraid she's going to die.'

'Tell her from me she'll have no such luck.'

'Garth!'

'All women ought to die at thirty-five.'

'Well, they do their best.' Mrs. Richard tossed her head and the plumes on her great hat waved. 'It's about the age they call in the doctor.'

'Nonsense,' said Sydney. 'Why thirty-five is just the time the modern woman begins to think seriously of marriage.'

'I wouldn't advise you to put it off so long,' said Garth.

'I'd begun to think I was never to see Winston again.' Mrs. Richard accepted Katharine's tea. 'But now that you've undertaken this gentleman——'

'Oh, but I haven't! It's the other way about.'

Garth looked at his watch. 'Do you want a lift?' he said to his step-mother. 'I'm going past the O'Brians.'

'No, thank you,' began Mrs. Richard and then hesitated. It was an unheard of thing for Garth to be so civil. Too much of material consequence depended upon his good-will, to sacrifice it in any cause less dear than that of 'just giving him a piece of my mind.'

'You will leave Leonard,' Katharine was saying, seeming to consider Garth's proposal accepted.

'No, he has a lesson at——' Mrs. Richard interrupted herself with her high mirthless laugh: 'Really if either your wife or I were suspicious we might almost think——' Again she hesitated.

'I understood you to say you were going to the O'Brians,' said Vincent. Under his impatience was a dogged patience that made his wife wonder. In spite of the immediate deterioration of his manners under the step-motherly eye, he had already endured much, and in spite of his half-past five engagement, here he still was, listening to Mrs. Richard's:

'In the height of the season you suggest I should go to the country, and in the middle of my first visit, you want to take me to the O'Brians.'

They quietly measured swords. She rose a little nervously, as West came in.

'After all I shall see you often,' she assured Katharine, 'and I will confide to you that the offer of a lift from Garth is an unprecedented grace.' She looked round for her parasol. 'Who are you going to see at Chelsea?'

'A man.'

'What did I tell you? Well, as I'm a poor miserable creature without a carriage—you don't know anything about it, of course, but for a woman to go about London as much as I have to, without a carriage——'

The door opened and the servant announced 'Lord Peterborough.'

'Bertie! I *am* glad.' Katharine had greeted her old ally with enthusiasm, before she took in the fact that he was slowly followed into the room by Falconbridge. She was in the act of introducing him to her husband, when she saw they already knew one another, and was conscious of a vague sense of surprise, of incongruity.

'I regard this as an indiscretion,' Lord Falconbridge began in his deliberate way. 'You must blame Amherst.'

'Blame?' exclaimed Katharine, 'I applaud him.'

In the general hum of conversation Mrs. Richard resumed her seat with an air of fixed purpose. Without introduction she knew who the elder man must be. Photographs and cartoons had made

his face public property. Sydney, after saying good-bye hurriedly to Katharine, lingered at the door long enough to see Garth turn away from the new arrivals, and say to Mrs. Richard: 'I'm going.'

'Oh, are you? Good-bye then.'

'You're not coming!'

'I believe I won't, after all, thank you *just* the same. It was sweet of you to——'

Anything less sweet than Garth were difficult to imagine, as he said significantly: 'Well, you won't be asked again.'

'Why not?'

'I don't like people with minds like weathercocks.'

'I believe you want to make me a scene.' Mrs. Richard uncovered her teeth.

As Garth passed Leonard, the boy put out a detaining hand, although Bertie was making friends with him. Mrs. Richard did not at all like the look in her step-son's face. In two seconds she had weighed the matter. Lord Falconbridge must be on rather intimate terms to stroll in, unasked, in this informal way. He would be here often. But if that prickly customer, her step-son, were rubbed too violently the wrong way—irritating animal! Unwilling Mrs. Richard found her feet. 'Of course I'm coming,' she said with an air of forced amusement. 'I only wanted to see what sort of *tête* you'd make.' She laughed vivaciously. 'I suppose you'll let me say *au revoir* to your wife,' and she joined the others, who were talking rather low, as it seemed to a woman whose frankness was apt to take the form of screaming. Katharine's face was radiant with happiness, and Lord Falconbridge was looking at Katharine in a way—— 'Well!' mentally ejaculated Mrs. Richard,—'and his wife not dead six months!' Then aloud:

'I must make up another time for the shortness of this——' She stopped, annoyed at Katharine's obliviousness. 'I'm sorry to interrupt this engrossing conversation, but Garth positively insists on carrying me off with him.'

For one instant Lord Falconbridge stared at her rather rudely, and pointedly turned away. He stood talking to Garth while the two women made their adieux.

'Now, when are you coming to dine with me?' demanded Mrs. Richard.

'I don't know what our plans are. I'll speak to Garth, and let you know.'

'Speak to him now.'

'Oh, he's talking to—— I'll telephone you in the morning.'

'No time like the present. Garth!' He raised his eyes. 'What night this week will you and Katharine come to dine?'

'We can't this week.'

'What's your first free evening?'

'Haven't any free evenings.'

'Oh, nonsense——' Then aside to Katharine as Garth turned his back and listened attentively to Falconbridge, 'If that high and mighty person has come to talk privately, why wasn't he taken to the consulting-room?'

Katharine ignored that. 'I knew Garth had a good many engagements just now. But later——'

'Come without him!' suggested Mrs. Richard suddenly. 'That'll be even better. We'll have a cosy little dinner all by ourselves.'

'Thank you, I don't think——' She looked towards her husband.

'Oh, you'll soon see you'll have to spend a great deal of your time alone if you wait for Garth. "No free evening" is an old cry.'

'Just now—it seems to be the time of year that all the scientific bodies come to London——'

Mrs. Richard laughed maliciously. 'Is that what he tells you?'

Again Katharine ignored the interruption.—'Lectures, receptions to foreign celebrities, the dinner of the Pathological Society——'

'Oh yes. As my youngest sister used to say, "Society of some sort, no doubt." Muriel is great fun. You must know Muriel. Come and dine with us quietly to-morrow.' As Katharine was about to speak: 'You'll be all alone. I know you will.'

'Alone? No, I——'

Mrs. Richard raised her voice. 'Isn't it to-morrow, Garth, that you make your address before the Royal——?'

He looked round and merely nodded.

'That's all right, then! Katharine's coming to dine with Muriel and me.'

'No, I'm going to hear the address!'

'Fancy you caring—— Thursday, then!'

'We're dining that night,' said Garth, 'with the——' Although she waited, he did not finish.

'Who with?'

But again he seemed to give his whole mind to Lord Falconbridge.

'Well, Friday,' said Mrs. Richard, in a half-whisper. But it only served to show how little of the talk not meant for him Garth was missing.

'She can't be out every night.'

'Why not?'

'She has to take care of her health.'

Lord Falconbridge discreetly joined Bertie, and made acquaintance with Leonard.

'Really, Garth, you can't think it would overfatigue her just to dine quietly round the corner.'

'She won't dine anywhere without me. Good-bye;' he went over to the two men by Leonard's chair, but stood a moment longer, talking.

A gleam of suspicion had crossed the dislike in Mrs. Richard's face. 'Not dine without him!' she said, in an outraged undertone. 'Does he imagine you're going to stand that?'

Katharine smiled. 'I wouldn't be surprised.'

'Well, if I were in your place, I wouldn't lose any time in waking him from that rosy dream. To expect a woman like you to sit at home while he runs about, paying visits all day, and dining at night with his——'

'Not every night,' said Katharine, with an obvious effort after civility.

Mrs. Richard, pinching her lips, sent her hard glance across the room to her step-son. 'You can't expect to make a domestic animal all at once out of a man who's led the life Garth has.'

For the first time Katharine dropped her tolerant manner. 'I don't understand you.'

Mrs. Richard caught herself up. 'Oh, of course, it will be different now—to a great extent. We are all so *delighted* to have him married. And not married to . . . the wrong person.'

'That,' returned Katharine coldly, 'is always a subject for congratulation.'

'I assure you we've had frights, my dear!' Mrs. Richard spoke hurriedly, confidentially. 'I consider him in great luck; and I shan't mind saying as much to him. Everybody else has always been afraid of Garth. He hears the truth from *me*. Oh, you'll find me the frankest person of your acquaintance.'

Bertie had left the others, and came strolling over to Katharine. 'I suppose it's through the Princess Isabella.'

'I hadn't heard that Garth knew her particularly,' replied Katharine off her guard.

'*You've* always been rather a favourite in that quarter.'

'You don't think that sort of thing counts?'

'Oh, she's an accomplished wire-puller, is the Princess. If there are honours going, she sees no reason why they shouldn't be conducted into channels she has made.'

'You are greatly mistaken,' said Katharine quickly, 'if you think I have anything to do——'

'Didn't she send for you the other day?'

'The Princess Isabella did?' asked Mrs. Richard.

'She wrote to me about some poems of mine, and said I might come——'

'Exactly. You vividly revived an old interest, and fired her to——'

'You forget,' returned Katharine, 'he saved Prince Charles's life.'

'Why, that was Garth,' said Mrs. Richard, who had been goggling from one to the other with speechless astonishment.

'Surely his record is quite enough to account for——' Katharine lowered her voice. 'I hope no one will be so mistaken as to suggest that I—that there's any motive behind the proposal other than Garth's own deserts. He would certainly refuse the knighthood if——'

Mrs. Richard gasped. 'What!'

'Would he?' inquired Bertie, with polite incredulity.

'Beyond any shadow of doubt,' said Katharine quickly.

'A knighthood!' breathed Mrs. Richard.

'Sh! Yes. It mustn't be spoken of just yet. Oh, are you going? Good-bye.' Katharine shook hands with Bertie much

more coolly than she had greeted him, looked up, and saw her husband pausing at the door with his eyes fixed on her. She went to him. 'You want to speak to me?'—although he had uttered no syllable. What he said now was in an undertone. Very low she answered, 'You think only of the child.'

'No, I don't,' he said. Then over Katharine's head to Mrs. Richard, still making her adieux: 'If you're coming, come,' and he was gone.

'My *dear* Garth!' Mrs. Richard called after him. 'Coming? Of course! Leonard darling, West is waiting. Good-bye!' She made for the door with more trepidation than pleasure. But whatever lay before her in this *tête-à-tête*, for the first time in his life sought by her step-son, she had the satisfaction of feeling that she was not departing without having planted her sting. She had only to look at the face Katharine bent over Leonard to feel assured of that. Well, it was far better not to start with illusions. 'Good-bye, my dear!'

'Shall we be toddling?' Bertie said to Falconbridge.

'You haven't had much talk with——'

'Oh, she has only one topic now.'

Bertie walked beside Leonard's chair as West wheeled the boy out.

'Well, having offered you my congratulations——' began Falconbridge.

'No—don't go—don't. I must have someone to talk to. I feel rather wrought up. Your news, I suppose. Sit here.' Katharine dropped into a chair, and covered her face for the briefest moment with her hands. When they fell, he saw to his surprise that she was laughing. 'Wasn't Mrs. Richard appalling?'

'H'm.'

Her laughter was low but a trifle hysterical. 'I oughtn't to say that—but Garth himself detests her. He endures her only on poor little Leonard's account.'

'The boy?'

Katharine nodded. 'He's a darling.'

'I perceive,' said Lord Falconbridge with a little smile, 'that the least patient person of my acquaintance grows tolerant.'

Katharine was suddenly grave. 'When people don't marry

as boy and girl, there is—in the woman at least—a wish first of all to understand that past she hasn't had a share in—understand it before—she rejects it.'

'Ah.'

'You say that as if you were surprised I should think I could reject——'

'If I am surprised, it is rather that you should hope to understand.'

She laughed again. 'Oh, it isn't as different as all that.'

'Isn't it?'

'Let us forget about——' she began impulsively, with a motion of her hand towards the door. 'Let us talk about the things we used to.'

CHAPTER IV

WHAT followed, the more took Katharine by surprise, in that Vincent seemed willing to see her friends about her in Cavendish Square, and was ever ready, in spite of the enormous labour of his professional life, to go about with his wife in the evening. In his undemonstrative fashion, he showed that he was gratified by the admiration that followed in her wake. He observed her looks narrowly, and even, to Katharine's merriment, developed views about her frocks.

But he was not so complaisant when, as the season went on, her engagements multiplied and overlapped. Willing as he was, apparently, to see Katharine amuse herself, he resented any evidence of her 'overdoing'—resented it with a vigour to which it took his wife some time to adapt herself. He thought equally little of making her give up the most brilliant political party of the season, or a quiet *tête-à-tête* with a friend, if Katharine dared show a face too pale to please him. Any gratitude he may have felt to the Princess Isabella did not prevent him from telephoning to the palace, without even consulting Katharine, to say that his wife was tired, and would not be coming to 'dine quietly' that night with Her Royal Highness. Katharine perforce found herself 'husbanding' her strength (as she laughingly emphasized her new prudence), keeping her best looks for the eyes that were not to be cajoled.

It's for the sake of the child that is coming, she would think, not without a stirring of jealousy.

If Vincent was, as his wife flattered herself, softened, humanized, no change wrought in him prevented his falling, now and then, into one of those old black moods of surly silence, or his being swept from time to time by some sudden gust of rage.

But those who suffered in these new days were his servants, his relations, patients, friends. To Katharine he was singularly gentle.

‘The child! It’s all for the child,’ she would say to her ungrateful heart,—‘he was never so good to me before.’

She had left London gladly, and had not gone back till her little son was two months old. Even then, she waited for Vincent’s prompting: ‘It’s no kind of life,’ he grumbled. ‘You here and I three-quarters of the time alone in London.’ The speech pleased her, though she had laughed and said: ‘We like you better in the country, the baby and I,’ as if the child had had conscious experience of those few weeks in the summer.

Cavendish Square meant not only Mrs. Richard and the ‘awful sisters,’ the Past was there.

The coming of the child and the happiness he brought, had sent all shadows flying. But in her reluctant memory they gathered thick in Cavendish Square. All those unrecorded and never-named days, months, years, when she was not in the life that she longed to feel was undividedly hers.

‘One day, that too,’ she promised herself. But only through Garth must the possession come—not through any other. Yet it seemed as if ‘others’ were for ever waiting ready to forestall him—to rob her of the voluntary confidence, that she said to herself would be the final seal to union and to happiness.

Welcome as Katharine had made Paul Dalberg at all times, she felt herself to be too much under the magnifying glass in his presence, to be at ease with him. She knew, as the sensitive creature will, ‘he behaves to me as if I were someone else.’ Plainly, he did not accept her at face value. Not all to himself had he kept his silent speculation: ‘it isn’t probable she really cares about Garth; why does she pretend so furiously?’

In that few weeks’ experience in the summer, she had learned to be sorry when Paul appeared during Mrs. Richard’s visits. His being there seemed to accentuate the bitter taste those visits left behind. The air of staid old Cavendish Square seemed to go to the lady’s head. At ‘my step-son Sir Garth Vincent’s’ she was even more vivacious than elsewhere, and gave away so many pieces of her mind, that no after shortcoming in intelligence could have surprised any witness of her prodigality. If Katharine

baffled, piqued Paul Dalberg, not so Mrs. Richard, who certainly did all in her power to act as a corrective to Katharine's supposed subtlety. Mrs. Richard's conception of 'frankness' involved an unflinching pointing out of her step-son's shortcomings to his wife and to his closest friend; partly out of curiosity to see how this unknown quantity 'the wife,' would meet these strictures, partly out of a need Mrs. Richard felt herself to be under to show that she was not going to be dazzled by Garth's distinction, any more than she had been awed all these years by his overbearing ways.

In a feeble, half-laughing way, Dalberg would excuse the criminal, or sympathetically shake his big head over Garth's enormities.

Now, on the eve of Katharine's return to town, things that she had been glad to forget came back to her. She heard again Mrs. Richard's favourite formula, uttered with a modest air, as of one not fully comprehending her own virtues: 'I dare say it's a fault, but I always say what I think, and quite between ourselves——'

Katharine knew that, what perhaps most disconcerted Mrs. Richard, was to find that Garth's wife did not even put herself to the trouble of defending him, unless Leonard happened to be present. She had a disarming way of smilingly admitting the most damaging things. Had Mrs. Richard in an outburst of temper called him 'a rough creature': 'Haven't you had enough of the "smooth"?' the rough creature's wife would say. '*I have!*'

Was he called selfish? 'I like selfish people,' Katharine would answer. 'They're the only ones who aren't hypocrites.' And when the smoke had cleared away, she would still be found, laughingly insisting: 'Nothing would so disturb me as having to live with a philanthropist—it would be almost as uncomfortable as being married to a martyr.'

Dalberg watched with interest her success in passing over, with apparent calm good-temper, even Mrs. Richard's references to 'the racketty life Garth led for years.' On the first occasion only, Katharine had looked significantly from the lady to the other guest. But Mrs. Richard tossed her big hat: 'Oh, I haven't forgotten Paul Dalberg. We none of us mind him, do we, Paul?'

'It is my despair,' he had said with mock gravity, 'that you none of you do.'

And Mrs. Richard had added: 'You don't suppose we can tell Garth's very oldest friend anything, do you?'

These hints, it is but fair to say, were usually thrown out only after some collision with her step-son, which had brought into lurid relief his arch offence: restriction upon intercourse between Mrs. Richard and his wife.

'Now *why* can't you come, Katharine? It's very awkward for me. I *promised* Lady O'Brian. Why is Garth so determined to keep you and me apart?'

'That you are here to say so doesn't look much like——'

'Now you are making phrases. Why does he do it, Paul?'

'It would require great concentration to discover,' the Professor had replied.

'I should think he might know by this time I was to be trusted. Now did I ever tell anything I oughtn't?' she inquired of Katharine with a deliberately tricky air.

'I'm sure I don't know.'

'Yes, you do. You must admit I've been most discreet.'

'Discretion is well known to be your leading characteristic,' observed Dalberg.

'Oh, it's all very well to chaff,' she dropped her archness. 'But Garth's suspiciousness does sometimes irritate me to the point of——' She seemed forced to contemplate tapping a whole furnace-full of blazing indiscretions. But before Mrs. Richard knew it, Katharine had changed the subject as lightly as firmly.

On occasion, when he had outstayed Mrs. Richard, Paul would be aware that his friend's wife, when at last they were alone, betrayed something of the fatigue of one who has been gay and indifferent at some cost to herself. And it was at such times that he found her most sympathetic—and most perplexing. Once or twice he had permitted himself to manifest something of his approval of the way she both bore with, and defended herself against Mrs. Richard. As if to heal the wound he knew was there, though he was not permitted to see it, he would speak of the long close friendship that had existed between him and Vincent, and how Garth was a man that few women (no woman

he would have said, two months ago) could easily understand, least of all Mrs. Richard. But he, Paul Dalberg, knew him thoroughly—and here he would find the wife casting apprehensive looks at this ‘old friend, who knew’ as much as to say: ‘Be careful. Knowledge must not reach me that way.’

The proverbial curiosity of woman accorded ill with that air she more than once had worn, of appealing to Paul to keep the Past at bay. ‘Of course it’s an attitude,’ he would say to himself, ‘but it’s not a bad attitude,’ grudging admiration added.

Her marrying Garth—had it been effect of that notorious sudden weariness, that attacks those women over-difficult, and makes them at the eleventh hour, hurriedly take the nearest hand held out? Or was this queer marriage a mere hasty solving of some intricate personal question in which Garth was only secondarily concerned? A way of dulling an old pain?—or a satisfaction to some new pique? He had observed her with Bertie. But the amiable Bertie was too obviously her unregarded slave. Falconbridge! Could that have been it?

She arranged a little luncheon-party for the week after her return. It the last moment, not without misgiving, she included two of Garth’s scientific friends. It had gone better than she had dared to hope—thanks a good deal to ‘the dear Brutons’ and to Bertie.

They had all come up into the drawing-room again, and during the drinking of coffee that invariable cleavage had taken place, isolating once more the little groups that a deliberate effort had for an hour fused and amalgamated. The Brutons and Peterborough stood talking and laughing in the middle of the room, while Katharine with every aspect of absorption in Lord Falconbridge’s account of the effect upon the country of the Prime Minister’s speech, was covertly lending herself to the surprise she still felt at hearing her husband (sitting on the sofa between his two foreigners) speak by turns in terse, idiomatic French and Italian—‘quite as fluent as his English,’ she thought, smiling to herself, ‘which is not saying much.’ There was for her, not merely an effect of strength in his economy of speech—but something at times of pathos in his inarticulateness. It went to excuse his delay in finding those particular words for which all her life

seemed waiting. Vividly, too, this lack in him contrasted with her own facility in expression, and her acquaintance with the equally facile in artistic and in social life. But more and more to his wife, herself a lover of words and a juggler with them, Vincent's bareness of speech wore an effect of voluntary abstinence from the trivial and superfluous; acquiescence in, even a part of, the great universal silence that greets men's larger questioning. With words we may unpack the heart, but fill its deep wells never. From this man, at least, never a syllable more than just enough to get his meaning across the line that separates from silence. All plain and bald. Yes, No, Thanks, and Damn you.

Blanche came over to her, and Falconbridge joined the three men. 'We ought to go away early and let you rest,' said Mrs. Bruton.

'Rest? Nonsense.'

'You're looking rather fagged.'

'Hush.'

'You foolish creature, I believe you're positively afraid of admitting you're tired before that husband of yours.'

Katharine smiled. 'Well—perhaps I am.'

'Why, what does he say to you?'

'Oh, I'm not afraid of his saying much.'

'Heavens, what do you think he would do?'

'Put me to bed like a naughty child and take away my toys—not let me see a letter, a paper, a friend for two days.'

'Is that what he threatens?'

'He doesn't threaten. He will just do it.'

'Nonsense, I'm very sure he wouldn't go such lengths.'

'He has. And he will again if I look——'

'Are you nursing your baby still?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, that accounts for it.'

'Yes,' Katharine answered gravely, 'that accounts for it.'

The two foreigners came to make their adieux. Katharine stood at the door saying last words to them. Her husband having glanced at his watch shook hands with the others. As he was in the act of following the last of the two strangers:

'You aren't going?' said Katharine.

'Yes.'

'Oh no. It's so early.'

He glanced back at the four by the fire. 'You don't want me.'

'Do you think it's very nice of you to say that, the first time I have the Brutons and Bertie to lunch after being away so long?'

'It's not the first time you've had the other man.'

'Lord Falconbridge? Oh, he invited himself. He wanted to show me a paper he's written on——'

'Writes too, does he?'

She smiled. 'Why not?'

'Politics ain't enough! Well, I don't blame him for thinking so.'

'I don't gather that that's precisely his view. Politics are very absorbing.'

'You seem to think so.'

She laid her hand on his arm as he was escaping. 'You don't mind Lord Falconbridge coming, surely.'

'Oh, *I* don't have to talk to the fellow. You've got the trick of it?'

'The trick?'

'If he was a man of science now——' As Vincent was again turning away, Wilfred Bruton strolled towards them.

'I'm in the act of telling my husband,' explained Katharine, 'that he's dreadfully narrow about the worth of other professions.'

'Can a man be a great success in any profession he *doesn't* somewhat overrate?'

'Oh, I overrate mine, do I? Thanks. Good-bye.'

They laughed, and Wilfred turned to speak to Falconbridge.

'Oh! Garth!' Katharine called suddenly. He put an impatient face in at the door. 'I *did* ask Sydney.'

'What did you do that for?'

'Oh, just' (she lowered her voice) 'to have your friends represented too—and not only by a couple of snuffy savants.'

'Those are the two most distinguished biologists in Europe.'

'Yes, yes, of course. Still, I thought it would amuse you to have Sydney.' He frowned and she added hurriedly, 'I want her to know Lord Falconbridge, too. Sydney would interest him.'

'Don't agree with you. Syd isn't his sort,' and he bolted, leaving his wife to demonstrate that she was.

Mrs. Bruton had meanwhile found herself growing confidential with Bertie. 'She must loathe his people and most of his friends.

'Not Professor Paul,' said Bertie, 'and I'm sure she likes the little hunchback.'

'Poor Kitty. She's found out her mistake.'

'Mistake?' he echoed. 'Leonard's an awful nice little chap.'

Mrs. Bruton refused to follow down a by-path: 'Kitty ought to have married you.'

'She didn't think so.'

'She'll find this a very different London from the London of Peterborough House.'

'Well, she chose this.'

'Did she?'

'Why do you say that?'

'Because I know she didn't. He hypnotized her. There's something uncanny about that man. Don't you remember the day last year when he came to see Freddy?'

Bertie nodded. 'I was ridiculously happy that day. I thought everything was going so smoothly.'

'So it was,' said Mrs. Bruton with unusual emphasis. 'Then Vincent came.'

Bertie looked up, wondering: 'Well. He went up to see Freddy and he came down again. I remember perfectly. Nothing happened.'

'You think not?'

'Why, I was there. She didn't even speak to him.'

'She had meant,' said Mrs. Bruton, sinking her voice even lower, 'to cross to Paris that night.'

'She did cross.'

As Mrs. Bruton shook her head, 'What do you mean?' he demanded.

'I believe Vincent stopped her. I know——' She hesitated.

'What do you know?'

'*That Natalie went to Paris alone.*' Mrs. Bruton rose with the sudden remorse of a woman not given to indiscretion. Lord Falconbridge was saying good-bye to Katharine upon the appearance of Mrs. Richard, followed by Leonard and Sydney.

'I'm coming along with you, Mrs. Bruton, may I?' Bertie asked with a preoccupied air.

'Could I drop you?' interrupted Falconbridge.

'Will the new toy hold four besides the chauffeur?' Under cover of Mrs. Richard's screaming that she had only come in for a second to bring her friend Mrs. Belderson to see Garth, etc., etc., the last of the luncheon-party melted away.

'Well?' Wilfred Bruton faced Falconbridge as they all stood outside watching the chauffeur do mysterious things to incite the car to action. 'What do you make of that?' No one imagined he referred to Falconbridge's recent acquisition.

'Oh, she endures the fellow.'

'What do you think made her——'

The owner of the car turned up his collar with a superior air: 'Victim to that common weakness of woman—a liking to look on herself as a tamer of wild beasts. The wilder the beast the greater the victory.'

'And when the time comes for her to see she has failed?'

'Ah, she won't like that.'

'I'm very grateful to the beast,' Mrs. Bruton said as they whirled away—'very grateful that he isn't shutting Katharine out from her old friends. I liked him better to-day.'

'He's in good spirits at the moment,' answered Falconbridge. 'He has just killed an epic.'

'You don't mean Katharine's writing an——'

'I said an epic. We have just one poet of the antique stature——'

'Michael Craven! Yes,' agreed Wilfred.

'In the middle of his masterpiece,' Falconbridge went on, 'in an hour of depression yesterday, he went to Vincent.'

'Well?'

'Of course Vincent hasn't the dimmest notion of what's at stake—lays the Poet on his back, and flings his pen out of the window.'

'Ah, poor Craven's been ill for a year,' said Blanche.

'He's been told by half a dozen doctors——' began Wilfred.

'Pure nerves,' interrupted Falconbridge. 'All he wanted was a tonic—and to be kept going till he'd finished his *magnum opus*.'

'Perhaps,' said Blanche, 'Vincent felt it more the doctor's business to save the man's health rather than his book.'

'Sheer incapacity to appreciate what Craven was doing. He was telling those foreigners to-day that he went to Italy once. Why do you think he went to Italy?' Blanche laughed and shook her head. 'He heard that some fellow at the Naples Biological Station had invented a new stomach pump. He went to try it—on himself.'

Mrs. Richard meanwhile was relieving her feelings about the perfectly monstrous way Garth had treated Mrs. Belderson—wouldn't look at her because it was 'after hours,'—such a great friend of ours, too. I always hoped—we all did, didn't we, Syd?—that marriage would civilize him. "Wait," you remember my often saying, "wait till he gets a wife."

'You hadn't reckoned,' said Katharine easily, 'on his marrying the wrong woman.'

'Oh! The gossips have told you——'

'I've been told nothing—by gossips.'

'I see,' said Mrs. Richard acidly, 'you only mean you haven't the courage to correct his manners.'

Katharine caught Leonard's eye. 'I mean I haven't the desire.' Then with courageous mendacity, 'I like them as they are.'

'Well, I wouldn't admit that before any young person. It's a poor standard to set up.'

It was the truth in the observation that stung Katharine. She flushed as she retorted: 'If any person old or young can make as good a thing of his life as Garth has, he's in luck.'

Mrs. Richard uncovered her shining teeth. 'And you never mean to tell him when he's being outrageous?'

Again Katharine sent a covert glance at Leonard. He was listening intently. 'You don't expect that a swimmer, struggling in a storm to save a life, will stop and make fine speeches. Garth hasn't time or strength to think of the trifles that fill our lives.'

'Trifles! You think it a trifle to—— Well, I don't and I shall tell him——'

'I wouldn't trouble to do that if I were you. And since you ask me I'll tell you what I think.' She stood up, and in the eyes that had no recognition for Professor Paul, standing at the door, was a light of battle that no one there had ever seen before. 'I think,' she went on in a low penetrating voice, 'that Garth does

more good in a day than anyone else I know does in a week. And the day for him is long and harassing. When he once gets inside these doors, he shall have peace if I can get it for him.'

It was then that Professor Paul came in, and relieved the tension, while he tacitly supported Katharine, by saying that he'd just come from making an unsuccessful attempt to see Michael Craven. He would be very anxious but for the fact that the young poet was in Garth's hands, and then he sat down by Sydney, and seemed to forget everybody else.

'Don't blame me,' said Mrs. Richard aside to Katharine, seeming to feel the need of some atonement. 'I didn't bring her.'

'Bring——?'

'Syd. I found her in the consulting-room, with Garth.'

'You went in!' exclaimed Katharine.

'Yes'; then half apologetic, 'I had to take Mrs. Belderson, you know. But really that girl ought to be spoken to.'

A dim little smile crossed Katharine's face. 'Then there's no doubt Garth was doing it.'

'It was bad enough before. But I should think now that he's married——'

Abruptly the hostess left the room. She must go up to the baby.

Mrs. Richard soon departed, but even after Sydney, restless and absent-minded, had also gone, Paul stayed on, trying to forget his own dissatisfaction with life, in amusing Leonard for half an hour. Katharine's absorption in her baby must make a rather tragic difference to the little cripple. 'Wouldn't you like to play something?' Professor Paul asked.

'Oh, thank you, but'——

'But what?'

'Katharine will be back by-and-by.'

'That's all right. There are lots of games three can play.'

'But you see,' Leonard still employed the direct methods of extreme youth, 'Katharine plays better when nobody else is here but Stanley.'

'Stanley?'

'Yes, that's me. I told you years ago that I was going exploring when I grew up.'

'Ah, I remember.'

'It's too hot in the tropics to walk, you know,' Leonard explained a little hurriedly. 'I dare say you've heard that people—white people—get themselves carried about in the tropics.'

'Yes. To be sure,' said Professor Paul.

'You remember the picture of Stanley with his native bearers?'

'I can't say I——'

'Well, it's a good deal like this,' he patted the arms of his invalid chair. 'All the explorer does is just to mean to get there. There are plenty of people to do the carrying.'

'I believe you're right,' said Professor Paul, swinging his eye-glass. 'To mean to get there, that's the main thing.'

Leonard beamed at this most understanding of Professors.

'We practise a lot here, Katharine and I do. She *loves* it. Makes me awfully sick sometimes when I remember she's only a woman and can't ever do the real thing. But we practise. I lie here in the long thick tangle and wait for game. This is our jungle—when everybody's gone. Katharine does the roaring. Did you ever hear Katharine roar?'

'Yes,' said Professor Paul meditatively. 'I did once. I thought it rather good roaring too.'

'Oh, it's splendid! Makes me perfectly cold, so I can hardly aim straight. That's the lion I shot,' he pointed modestly to the big skin by the fire.

'Ah! I shouldn't care to have met *him*.'

'It was a bit awkward.'

'But you want a tiger, don't you? Shall I be the tiger?'

'Well, you see,' Leonard hesitated. 'Lord Falconbridge——'

Paul laughed. '*What!* His Pompousness would make a better elephant.'

'He's giving Katharine and me a tiger—stuffed, you know. We're hoping it may come this afternoon.'

'Ah!' Professor Paul swung a meditative eye-glass. 'That's how he does it.'

Five minutes later Lord Falconbridge was shown in, to Leonard's excited, '*Oh!* Is the tiger in the hall?'

'Well, no,' returned the dignified visitor. 'I'm in a great difficulty about the tiger.'

'Oh, *dear*——'

'You see there are two. One's a splendid fellow—so big,' he measured.

'Hah!' rejoiced the boy.

'The other's smaller—about so.'

'That's rather little, isn't it, for a tiger?'

'Well, you see she's a tigress and she has two cubs. They go along with her after the well-known custom of cubs. I didn't know which would be best. I couldn't make up my mind between their respective attractions.'

With a grave air of trying to help his Lordship out of his quandary, Leonard repeated: 'Cubs! Yes. Cubs would be rather splendid, don't you think?' politely he included the Professor in their deliberations.

'I think,' said that authority, 'cubs would be delightful.'

'——and a tigress,' pursued Leonard, 'is always fiercer of course.'

'Yes, there's that,' agreed Paul.

Leonard was torn between conflicting advantages. 'But how big did you say the tiger was——?'

'About——' Lord Falconbridge obligingly measured again.

'I think——' said Leonard, wrinkling his white forehead. 'No. Yes. It's terribly hard—— If only I could see them before we decide.'

'Well,' said Lord Falconbridge, 'the car is here. Why shouldn't we all go and——' He looked round as if expecting an addition to the company.

'Go now!' exclaimed Leonard. 'Go this minute? And bring back whichever tiger is——'

'I'm afraid we couldn't travel with the tiger,' his Lordship confessed with an air of such regret that Leonard felt bound to cheer him up.

'Oh, well, never mind that.'

'It can be sent later,' said Falconbridge.

'Of course.' Leonard leaned on his elbow, his shining eyes turned to Paul. 'Would you be so awf'ly kind as to ring that bell behind you? West can come too, can't he? And of course *you* will!' he took it upon himself to invite the Professor. 'Oh yes, please come too. Katharine can't. She has to be with the baby.' After a pause he took the two men into his confidence.

'I don't think much of that baby. What do *you* say?' West appeared in time to save the company from indiscreet admissions.

The incongruous three had departed on their tiger-hunt when Vincent came in, looked round as if he too were hunting, then dropped heavily into a chair by the fire and sat there in a tired heap. The servant appeared and made up the fire.

'Will you have tea, sir?'

'No.' After the hearth had been brushed up, 'Is Lady Vincent at home?'

'Yes, sir. Tea has just gone up to the morning-room.'

'Who's there?'

'Nobody, sir.'

'Whose motor-car was that?'

'Lord Falconbridge's, sir.'

Katharine came in and the servant vanished.

'Garth, come upstairs.'

'What for?'

'He is looking such an angel.'

Vincent turned his head away, and after a little silence: 'You soon won't know what he looks like if all your visitors stay as long as Falconbridge.'

'He didn't stay so long.'

'Oh, it didn't seem long?'

Katharine, who was quite ignorant of Falconbridge's return, was about to retort, hesitated, and looked narrowly at the dark face by the fire. 'What is the matter, Garth?'

'Nothing.'

But his eyes, his whole *Wesen*, contradicted the assurance. A sharp fear took hold of her. Was he ill? But a duller woman than Katharine would have seen he was in no mood for ordinary solicitude. She waited a while, picked up a book and pretended to read—made him think she had forgotten, or at all events ceased to observe him. He sat and glowered at the fire. By-and-by she went gently over to him, paused behind his chair, bent down and laid her cheek on his. She longed to speak, but kept her lips close shut. Presently, her reward. He drew away, but only to turn on her eyes full of dumb suffering like a wounded dog's—'Craven's dead,' he said.

'Oh, Garth!' She was at his side now on her knees. 'Oh, my

dear, I'm sorry.' The look in his face again arrested her. She felt her way: 'But the other doctors said recovery was impossible.'

'Any bungler can say as much as that.'

'But you didn't bungle.'

'I must have.' A great misery was in his face.

She stared at him. This was the other side of the shining shield of his professional life. 'What would you do differently,' she whispered, 'if Craven were alive now?'

'Nothing different.'

'Well—you see!' she breathed freer.

'That's only to admit how little doctors can do after all. It's *that*——' he jumped up, brushed past her and began walking rapidly up and down—'it's feeling so powerless now and then, that makes——' he drew his hand round his head, ruffling his hair.

'Makes what, dear?' She had risen and stood looking at him.

'——makes me sick.' He flung himself down on the sofa. 'If I had often to sign a death certificate, I'd give up my practice.'

Poor Garth, if it came often, someone else would be performing that duty upon him, thought Katharine. He lay quite still with hidden face, lay so long motionless that she hoped his exhaustion had merged in sleep. She brought a long cloak of hers out of the hall and covered him over. Then she went out again, to say she was not at home. What she most longed to do was to say that he was not, but she would no more have done so without his permission, than she would have read his letters. She knew he must live his own life in his own way, and this was not the first nor would it be the last occasion, wherein she could only suffer with him, and not say much. 'Just stand aside and love him,' she admonished herself. By-and-by he would feel the love, and it would help him—as only love with non-interference can help such a spirit.

She turned out the electric lights and only the fire flickered in the room.

By an effort of self-control she refrained from sitting close to him; that intelligence of love, that is akin to genius, told her that he would be fretted by any emphasis, just then, of sympathy or tenderness. But when he could rouse himself, when he should begin to wonder where she was, he would look round and find that she had been content to wait for just that moment.

It fell out a little differently from what she hoped. Not his own unprompted need of her roused him out of his wretchedness, but a call to action. A ring and a double knock, followed by Staines opening the drawing-room door, and standing there astonished at the absence of light.

Without raising his head: 'What is it?' demanded Vincent.

'A note, sir.' Staines turned on the light. 'Could you possibly come at once, sir? They've sent their electric brougham.'

Still lying there, Vincent read the note. 'I'll come,' he said.

'Very good, sir.' Staines went out and shut the door.

Vincent leaned on one elbow, and brushed his hair mechanically with his hand. He stood up, letting Katharine's cloak fall on the floor, and still making absent-minded passes at his ruffled hair, he walked towards the door. Suddenly he glanced round, saw Katharine sitting with locked fingers at the fireside, face upturned, looking at him with her heart in her eyes. Instantly he turned away again, as his shy or surly impulse always was, to rebuff or to ignore the open proffering of sympathy. He was more touched than he would have admitted, to find that she had been there, watching with him through that long dark hour. But it was not in him to say the word she longed to hear. He gave her instead, a commonplace travesty in the phrase: 'Don't wait for me,' and went out.

As the door closed behind him, the weight not only of his trouble fell upon her, but the sense of love's helplessness lay like defeat upon her soul. At such a time, at any crucial moment, one stands solitary. She had watched with him through his evil hour and yet he had been alone!

She lifted her arms suddenly above her head, and let them fall impotent in her lap, and let the tears rain down. Through her grief, she listened to hear the front door shut behind him. But instead she heard the knob of the drawing-room door turn sharply. Vincent came in dressed for a cold drive, crossed with his quick elastic step to where she sat, took her wet face in his hands and kissed her on the mouth.

'Thank you,' he said, and went out.

He had never done such a thing before, as stop in the midst of his work or his trouble to kiss her.

Then she had helped him.

CHAPTER V

WHILE she sat there, Paul Dalberg put his head in at the door. 'I thought I'd just look in to tell you that Falconbridge has taken Leonard safely home, after making the boy his slave for life.'

'Oh, come in, won't you——?'

While he accepted the invitation he went on: 'Leonard thinks you won't sleep if you aren't assured that the tiger hunt is crowned with success.'

'It is good of Lord Falconbridge——'

'Yes, *isn't* it!' replied Paul scoffingly. 'So unselfish.'

'Why do you say it like that? You ought to be more sympathetic, for you've been rather good yourself.'

'Oh *I*——' he waived away his claim.

She looked at him narrowly. Easy to see even he was not in the best of spirits. 'Sit down a minute,' she said. 'I want to tell you something. I used to be sorry when you came while Mrs. Richard was here. I shan't be any more.'

'Why not?'

'Not after the way you took Garth's part to-day. But I'd like you to tell me one thing.'

Ah! it was coming at last! She was wanting to be told.

'Do you know,' she went on, 'what it is that makes him so extraordinary?'

'How extraordinary?'

'Why in the way you said this afternoon. You and I realize if others don't——'

'Realize what?'

Sympathy with the failure to keep Michael Craven alive made it a solace to her to say: 'That he's the most wonderful doctor in the world.'

'We know that he's a wonderful man,' said Professor Paul. Katharine looked up suddenly. 'You aren't telling me that you don't believe in his skill.'

'He has his share.'

'Only that!' Katharine's tone was a little chilled. 'Then what do you mean by his being wonderful?'

'That he has something more than skill. You see, my dear lady, you have to know a good deal, to know how very little is known.'

'About——'

'The internal economy.'

'You don't mean that Garth doesn't know!'

'He doesn't know more than's been discovered.'

'But,' said Katharine doughtily, 'a great deal has been discovered.'

'Incredibly little,' said Professor Paul.

'You don't mean about sickness.'

'Just about sickness.'

'I am sure,' she persisted with involuntary childishness, 'Garth knows.' As Dalberg smiled: 'You think he doesn't?' she demanded.

'Did you ever hear him boast that he did?'

'Oh, *boast*.'

'Well, did you ever hear him so much as admit that he *knew* exactly what was amiss—*exactly* what to do?'

'I can't remember,' said Katharine.

'Nor anybody else.'

'But he must know. Look at his record.'

'His success,' said Dalberg, 'is undoubted.'

'Then how do you explain it? You don't surely think it is chance.'

'Chance!' the Professor laughed. 'Oh no. I began by admitting that Garth was "wonderful." He does brilliantly what every doctor does more or less . . . fills up the lacunæ in knowledge——' he paused.

'With——?'

'With the things that people need even more than they need health.'

'What does anyone need more than health?'

‘Hope.’ Professor Paul got up. Suddenly he was standing before her. ‘I am under the impression that you don’t get on with Sydney Ford.’

Her self-absorption prevented her catching the championship in his voice. ‘She isn’t sympathetic to me personally.’

‘Oh, isn’t she?’

‘—— and I don’t mean to pretend to like her specially. But if you mean’—Katharine’s eyes were sparkling suddenly,—‘if you mean am I jealous of Sydney Ford, *no*.’

‘Oh, I *didn’t* mean——’ he began.

‘Yes, you did. But isn’t this a digression from Hope?’

‘Well, I don’t know.’ He sat down again and took his chin in his hand. ‘It’s a difficult labyrinth we find ourselves in.’

‘You mean life?’

He nodded. ‘It’s because of that, Garth scores. Few who aren’t glad to listen when a man says: “Here’s a way!”’

‘Now you’re telling me that my husband’s a pretender— a quack trading on ignorance.’

‘I’m saying,’ persisted Garth’s friend, ‘that he gives people what most of all they need. The same thing takes people to doctors that takes them to church. It was no mind specially acute, and no figure of speech that called Christ the Great Physician—with all the sick world ready to listen to the one who should say with conviction, “This do and thou shalt be saved.” The greater the conviction the greater the success. Look at the Catholic Church and the Salvation Army. Those two cover the widest field in the Western world. Neither considers any soul beyond the reach of help. From the opposite ends of society the weary and bewildered go gratefully to one or other to hear the accent of conviction—to be reassured.’

‘Surely what honest people are after is the truth.’

Slowly and a little wearily Professor Paul shook his big head. ‘Very few in any age want the truth—even if it could be found. What they want is cheer. Whether it comes out of a bottle or a book,’ he shrugged, ‘what matter?’ He got up to take his leave. ‘If health was what people mainly wanted they’d get it without going to the doctors.’

‘How would they get it, Professor Paul?’ Katharine smiled.

‘By observing themselves as no doctor has time to do. But

Lord bless you, health *isn't* the main thing, so Garth and the rest are kept busy.'

'You think you've been telling me news?' demanded Katharine.

'Oh, I haven't?'

She shook her head. 'I found out long ago that Garth was a Black-Magic Man.'

'Exactly,' said Garth's friend with a seriousness to which Katharine had no key, 'that's the secret of his success.'

It was the last confidential talk she had with Paul for some time—and still she was too absorbed in her own problems to realize that what she had said about Sydney was costing her a friend.

She missed him the less in that Falconbridge had fallen into the habit of coming to see her almost daily, and was often received in the jungle with or without that mighty hunter Leonard. On the rare occasions when Vincent looked in during his busy hours, he would sit a few minutes quite stolid and absolutely silent, listening darkly to the talk, like one having slight acquaintance with the tongue yet conscious of grave need to follow the conversation. With secret wonder he heard Katharine's share in it. She spoke the language fluently, understood the allusions, used the same shibboleths. Falconbridge was the old life embodied. *Her* life. . . . Vincent was a stranger there.

A mark of the change working in him, a sign of dawning grace, though it came so greyly, was his simple facing of the evidence, that this man—of the type Vincent wanted to despise, secretly wondered at, vaguely feared—this man was the obvious complement of Katharine's life. As her husband compared himself with Falconbridge he felt his own rude advantages shrink out of sight.

And for the first time these things mattered. When he came to realize the chasm that others felt lay between himself and Katharine—came even to share the supercilious man of the world's wonder as to how the chasm had been bridged, or if it really *were* bridged—that was to be 'smitten into the place of dragons,' that to be 'covered with the shadow of death.'

No realization visited Vincent of the fact that while from the lower orders of creation up to man, love rouses a great longing

for pre-eminence, a need to outshine as well as utterly to vanquish rivals—in men and women not altogether of the baser sort love brings to birth a power to make the only atonement possible, for lacks and failures impossible to forgive ourselves.

Those who truly love us must help us to bear our own unworthiness, for this is the thing we cannot bear alone.

Not until we get beyond the ancient, instinctive, wish to dazzle eyes that are dear, by our fine feathers of wit or beauty, goodness or philosophy, may we find love's highest and most precious opportunity in helping to endure the absence of excellences lost or never found.

All the world will be sorry for a man run down in a fog, but who will sympathize with him and not shrink, if groping in spiritual twilight, overtaken by untoward circumstance and his own soul's weakness, he turn coward, lying, mean? Yet what maiming of the body can be so tragic?

Are we dumb when we should speak? Suspicious when we should have faith? Rough when we should be gentle? That the world cannot forgive us these things is the least of our suffering. We cannot forgive ourselves. We cannot forgive God—unless human love show us the soul of goodness in things evil. Out of the dark that gathered about Garth Vincent, out of his dumb suffering, came no better thing at first than need to inflict pain.

And of that, more pain.

Vincent began to notice that now when he came in during any visit of Falconbridge's, that gentleman would forthwith get up and take his leave, with calm disregard of any construction that might be put upon his admission of the fact that, however much he might have to say to Katharine, he had absolutely nothing to say to Katharine's husband.

Once Vincent astonished his wife by asking, after Falconbridge was gone: 'What do you two find to talk about?'

'Oh, all kinds of things. He is certain there'll be an appeal to the country before——'

Garth interrupted: '—— shows you his "papers," I suppose, and you show him yours.'

'My papers?'

'Your *poetry*.' The old contemptuous accent.

He was miserably jealous of those new poems she did not show at all events to her husband. Why didn't she show them? Had Falconbridge inspired—was he in them?

'What is weighing on you, Garth?'

'What should weigh on me?' he had asked sharply.

'I thought perhaps someone was very ill—you might be anxious.' Moodily he shook his head. Mrs. Richard's voice sounded in the wife's ears. But Katharine had told herself that in explanation of any masculine mood, not otherwise accountable, to cry "*cherchez la femme*," was the impotent way of such women as Mrs. Richard, asserting their sex's questionable power. And yet—— The black wretchedness in the face of the man at the fire, if it were not the outcome of some heavy usury exacted by the past, surely, surely it would be less hard to share with sympathy such as hers. Vaguely, before this, she had met the possibility of his bursting out one day: 'While you think only of this child, there's another I cannot forget.' And she told herself how she would amaze and soften him by saying: 'Bring home the other child.'

Now he had lifted his head and seemed fiercely to search her face for something he expected to surprise there. Does he want to tell me? thought the woman, hoping. Does she want to tell me? thought the man, fearing.

When Sydney came in at these times, Vincent would revive—ask her where she had been keeping herself, and why had she not been in the Row that morning; as if not seeing more of her was all his quarrel with life. No eyes for anyone but Sydney. Almost eloquent in approval of her riding. '—— never saw any woman at her best on a horse but Syd.'

Katharine's only sign, her being a little more pleasant to the 'favourite cousin'—who, misunderstanding, was half sorry for the wife—and yet—there was this sensation of flying down some steep incline and not being able to stop herself. From time to time the girl all but cried out to Paul Dalberg.

Vincent let drop, as by a chance, that he was going to be able to get away to Winston this week-end.

Katharine went down with the baby by a morning train. Vincent arrived worn out, harassed, ready to flare.

When she had given him tea Katharine got up to leave him.

'Where are you off to?'

'Only upstairs.'

'What for?' though he knew perfectly what mother's duty the hour brought.

Katharine had glanced at the clock. 'You won't be lonely. Sydney is coming at six.'

'What if she is? I didn't ask her.'

'No. I did.'

'Why?'

'I—I thought she would amuse you.'

He turned his lowering look fiercely on her, as if to find and challenge any weakness, any lying—or may be, more than all, any 'martyr-nonsense.'

But Katharine returned the dark look steadily. 'She will stay the night.'

Then it was vaguely he realized that, although he would have expressed indignation at the spectacle, it would have soothed this growing misery, drugged the black devil in his breast to have found Katharine jealous. He would not let her go till he had tried, searched, probed her, till Katharine had said: 'Of course I felt it the other day when you disappointed me of my ride and took your cousin.'

'You could have come too.'

'It is hardly the same thing.' Hastily she added, 'With *any* third person.'

'Then why do you ask Syd here?'

With an effort at self-command, a sense that she was on trial and much depended on the way she acquitted herself, 'I've thought it out,' answered Katharine. 'There are very few people you care to be with—my friends are nothing to you. Even your own very little. You work hard and you' (she looked up, smiling a little uncertainly) 'you work well. You deserve relaxation. Who shall put it in your way if not I?' Then so quickly as to sound sharp, the words: 'I have faith in you, you know, or I couldn't.'

This was not what, clumsily, he had been playing for.

'Humph. You're offering me Sydney as you'd offer a baby a sugar-stick.'

'Sh,' said Katharine suddenly. 'There she is.'

He sat glowering; merely nodded curtly when the girl came in, filling the quiet room with her loud free manner and cheerful talk.

Katharine, rather more quiet even than common, was entirely pleasant. After making fresh tea for the visitor she was in the act of rising, when lo! Garth was on his feet—and in that way of his, as though obeying some imperative call, like a flash he was out of the room.

'Where are you off to?' called Sydney, setting down her cup. As the only answer was the shutting of a door, she turned to the wife.

'Perhaps to the stables,' suggested Katharine.

With small ceremony Sydney went after him.

Katharine sat chin in hand, staring at the carpet. Presently Sydney tramped in again, with two dogs at her heels.

'Has he come back?'

'No,' said Katharine.

'Well, where on earth has he vanished to?'

'I can't imagine unless he's in his den.'

Sydney marched to the dingy sanctum where even Turk knew he might not go.

The woman by the fire sat erect holding on to the arms of her chair. She could not have counted ten before Sydney reappeared in the hall as if she had been shot out of a cannon. Garth loomed behind the scarlet-checked Amazon.

'Why, how should I know I wasn't to go there?' she protested. 'Katharine suggested it.'

'Katharine! You sug——' he seemed about to advance to the arch-culprit over Sydney's prostrate form. 'Why the devil do you send people bothering? By God, a man must have some place to himself.'

Katharine went to him quickly, gravely: 'Garth, you are not to speak like that.'

'You know,' he barked rather than said, 'I won't let any one come after me there.'

'Why, I saw Katharine come out of that room the very last time I——'

'Katharine!' he burst out. 'What's that got to do with it! Katharine's my wife.'

He turned and fled. They heard a door slam.

If Vincent had come to have no doubt to the appeal that Falconbridge of necessity made to a woman like Katharine, Falconbridge was wholly without understanding of Vincent's hold on his wife.

She, absorbed in the problem of her own existence, looked upon her almost daily visitor as a pleasant link with the old life, and a welcome distraction from the perplexity of the new. In her heart-soreness she was grateful that he took the trouble to divert her. Great things were happening in the world outside. The public crisis could for an hour make her forget her private affairs.

Yet sometimes talk would stray, and Falconbridge being there did not prevent her dropping back into well-worn channels of thought. Mention had been made of a man and woman both had known. 'She was not in love with Douglas all those years,' Falconbridge said with sudden impatience. 'She was in love with love.'

'I've had times of wondering,' Katharine replied meditatively, 'if that isn't true of all but the most unhappy women.'

Falconbridge eyed her curiously. Weeks ago he had cast the husband out of calculation. Not that he pretended to guess why Katharine had married him, but the more he saw of them both, the more was it incredible that she should care for Vincent. Upon that firm foundation Falconbridge was proceeding with some skill to make love to her. Hitherto the skill had held the other element sufficiently in check. But what did she mean by wondering if all women were in love with love, 'all but the most unhappy?'

'You are not the most unhappy?' he said tentatively.

'I? Far from it.'

Was it her way of saying that in spite of this unideal marriage she cherished the ideal still—still was waiting——

'Some women,' she went on in that abstracted tone, 'are more thorough about it than others—that's all the difference.'

'More thoroughly in love with love?'

She nodded.

What precisely did she mean? How 'thorough' was she prepared to be?

'If a woman is in your phrase so "thorough" that she goes all lengths——' he was beginning when Katharine interrupted.

'If she gives up everything—and even if she gets nothing in

return, if she has ruined her life—all the more she must be “thorough,” all the more she must hold fast for ever to the ruined happiness.’

To project possibility so far was to be over-pessimistic. Falconbridge stroked one eyebrow. ‘I don’t know that I follow you,’ he said.

‘A woman may come to think she has paid too much for a thing not to rate it high. I am sure there are people (women at least) who cling to love not so much because it is love, as because it is justification. All the same,’ she added quickly, ‘I believe there *is* validity in mature passion.’ She had no eyes for that in his face to which unconsciously she had given name. ‘And it’s because there is something in character, don’t you think, that makes fitness? Something that, no matter what happens, *lasts*, because it’s the essence of personality.’

‘I’ve thought so—lately,’ he said.

‘—something that keeps tenderness alive, even——’ She caught the look of mystification that crossed his face—‘something that makes one man’s faults more endurable than another man’s virtues.’

Lord Falconbridge considered the proposition—but really she could not be held to be flattering, this analytic lady.

‘In the very young,’ she went on, looking back along her life, ‘I suppose it is blood alone that cries out; or blood plus the attraction of some glittering outward advantage.’

Ah, he had caught up with her now. Clearly she was thinking of Breitenlohe-Waldenstein.

‘Exactly,’ said Falconbridge. ‘It is only later, as you say——’ He was about to take her hand, but dreamily she leaned forward chin in palm and stared into a bowl of roses on the low table by her chair.

‘In the maturer spirit’ (how grave the woman was he thought; she should be happier, seeing how he bent and gave largesse with his eyes)—‘in the maturer spirit,’ she went on, ‘the demands are greater. The rewards must be not so much quite other than young blood asks, but those and others besides. A case with us,’ a flitting smile made the face in some way even sadder than before, ‘a case of Sibylline Leaves. Each time, the woman has less to offer, each time she demands more.’

'I will not hear you say you have less to offer,' he said tenderly

She half roused herself, but her eyes were strangely unseeing
'And the man—what if he does balk, mystify, anger, hurt the woman——'

'Oh, come! Not as bad as that!' Lord Falconbridge disguised his satisfaction. He was not easy to flatter, yet to be assured that he had power for all this over a woman who had seemed so little responsive—it gave him an unfamiliar sense of elation.

'Better so,' the low voice finished, 'than absence of these hurts and presence of someone else.'

'You can't really think that I would hurt you,'—his hand closed on hers.

While Katharine was saying '*You!*' the door opened suddenly and Vincent stood there.

'Good-bye!' said Falconbridge. Seeming quite unmoved, he loosed her hand.

The man exchanged curt greeting as the visitor passed out. Vincent went away directly after. 'Called out of town,' was all the word he left.

The next day when Katharine allowed the nurse to go out, she told her to leave word as she went down, that if Lord Falconbridge called he might come up to the nursery.

What an extraordinary message! thought that gentleman. What did it mean? He found her at the top of the house, sitting in the level light of afternoon, singing the child to sleep. She did not pause upon his entrance, nodded, pointed to a chair, and went on till the cradle-song was ended. 'You wanted me to come here?' he said in the silence, still mystified.

'If you wanted to see me,' she answered quite low. 'But it is very good of me to admit you to my holy of holies. Few people are allowed here.' He looked round the pretty white room. 'I could not give you a better proof of friendship,' she added.

'Of friendship!' he echoed irritably.

'Exactly! Of friendship.' The child stirred. Very softly she began a new lullaby.

Vincent had come back close on Falconbridge's heels. No need to ask who was there with those horses at the door. Well, this was what he had expected. He had only waited for this—

to come back without warning—to make certain that in his absence and after what he was sure had passed, Katharine would receive Falconbridge again. With mounting passion he went from room to room.

This was the song Lord Falconbridge had told her was 'the best' she yet had made. Yes, his critical unwillingness reaffirmed, as the cadences fell upon the quiet—he had been right. Motionless he sat there, insensibly soothed not alone by the singing, by the soft purity of the woman's face and air as well. The picture ministered to the man's weariness as much as to a fastidious artistic taste. In this mood he liked looking at her much as he liked the Lippo Lippi Mary. As the door was roughly opened he said to himself, 'And all wasted on this uncouth creature!' 'Perhaps not often,' he consoled himself. 'It is my holy place,' she had said. She looked round as Vincent came noisily in: 'Hush!' she said. 'You'll wake him.' But there was an unseen something in the room that even he could feel, that without her words would have sealed his angry lips.

He flung himself into a chair. Lord Falconbridge went away and left the two alone together. But Vincent did not tarry long. 'No time. *I'm* not a gentleman of leisure!'

What had kept him away these four-and-twenty hours? What hidden trouble had so changed him? The gentleness and care of all those months before the child was born had waned until they vanished. Besides the dark preoccupation in his thoughts, no ears, no eyes now, no interest that he was ready to own outside of his profession. His life was flung into his work, as a Roman criminal was flung to the lions—and the work rent and tore him. When Katharine would remonstrate at some bitter flying comment he would say with an oath, 'The rest of you may pretend if it pleases you. It's my business to deal with things as they are. I see the seamy side all day long.' And in the midst of her defence of the 'human nature' he so savagely despised, she came to dread that silent laughter that seemed to shrivel kindness and to blast good faith.

Only Mrs. Richard was left in the drawing-room, one day after he had gone, to comment upon his taciturnity. Katharine spoke of possible professional worries.

'No, a mere habit,' Mrs. Richard assured her. 'If he ever knew how to talk he's forgotten. One can't altogether blame him. All those years his life was not the kind of thing he *could* talk about, you know.'

'I don't know, Mrs. Vincent.'

'Oh, my dear, it's absolutely no use to make a mystery about it. Anybody must know that a man like Garth didn't live like a monk all that time before he married you.'

'Here's another reason,' Katharine would say to herself, 'why people should marry young.' Instead of being divided by jealousy of the days unshared, they are bound by common memories. Was that at the root of the world's ready sympathy with first love? Was it a vicarious shrinking from the irony of the Past?—unwillingness to be reminded of the evanescence of the transfiguring light, dread of hearing behind the new vows, echo of the old? She had come to a place where she stood straining her ears for that echo; craving pain as men commonly crave pleasure, the pain of hearing from his lips some halting hard confession, that out of past disillusionment should bring future peace.

But meanwhile as that for which she longed showed no sign of approach—that which instinctively she dreaded most, seemed to be coming nearer.

Insistently evoked by this one and by that, the Past, which day by day should recede, growing faint and ever fainter till it was faded quite—this Past came steadily closer. There were times now when she held her breath, feeling: *It is on the threshold!* When that door opens, I shall know.

One morning an anonymous letter in an illiterate hand. The scrawling signature 'An unknown friend' sent the blood to her face. *This* was the way people heard. She read a venomous attack upon the character of one of the men-servants.

As slowly the hope died that it would be through Vincent enlightenment would come, she tortured herself with wondering under what guise it would reach her. Would the door bell ring one day and in sweep a woman for the orthodox interview? Or would a shabby creature, with a dark-eyed child, stop her in the street some twilight hour, saying: 'Help me. I was as much to him long ago as you are to-day.' Or would one of their kind

friends in some gay gathering, point out—‘that dashing creature over there. See? For years she was Garth’s *chère amie*.’

No, it would come in more lurid guise. There would be an awful scene of some sort, and the past would be avenged—not realizing how every hour vengeance was being wreaked.

CHAPTER VI

It was a curious fact that Katharine's self-absorption had made her take Falconbridge's avowal comparatively lightly. He had made a mistake. What then? Life was full of mistakes. Would they were all of as little consequence as this! Besides, he was ill, and needed the friendship he had seemed to despise. He was very sensitive about letting the public get wind of his true condition, telling Katharine it would hurt him fatally. The task before him was one to tax the strongest. For even a whisper of doubt, as to his physical ability to carry through the great new public measure, would hamper him incomparably. The situation roused Katharine's sympathies; she knew how he had fought for, waited for, this moment. The Government that he had so successfully undermined, so vigorously attacked, was toppling to its fall. The ambition of his life was on the verge of accomplishment. Any day, any hour, the King might be expected to send for him to form a Cabinet.

Late one afternoon Vincent and Dalberg had come in together, to find Katharine sitting alone at the writing-table in the drawing-room. It did not escape Vincent that, as she greeted them, she laid a sheet of blotting-paper over a half-written page.

'Where's Falconbridge?' demanded her husband.

'Falconbridge!' she echoed in some surprise, and so far was he from her thought, she stopped to think: 'Oh, he's gone to Little Matley.'

'What is he doing at Little Matley?'

'Staying with the Brutons.' And upon something more than common equivocal in his face, added: 'Didn't you know they'd taken that old Manor?'

'No.'

'Oh yes, some time ago.' That he hadn't heard, how it emphasized the long absence from Winston! He never wanted to go there now. There was a pause that no one bridged, till Dalberg observed in the tone of one who not so much makes conversation as manufactures commonplace: 'Shockingly ill Falconbridge was looking yesterday.'

'Did you think so?' said Katharine, carefully wiping her pen.

'Didn't you?' returned Paul.

'Oh, he's been having a harassing time of it just lately,' she answered.

'You mean you don't believe the man's ill?' demanded her husband.

'I suppose a great political crisis like this tells on a person who knows he's responsible for it.'

Covertly Vincent watched her as she sat there, passing her slim hand over the blotter, and then withdrawing it, only to close the white vellum book in which he knew she copied out her verses. He had seen the book in Falconbridge's hands. It had never yet been in his own.

'What are you writing?' he said suddenly.

'O—a—some notes I make from time to time.'

'If they're only "notes," let's see.'

As he spoke she was snapping the patent spring fastening, that was so disproportionately massive to the book. 'It's a good piece of binding.' She handed him the locked volume. He flung it down without a glance. 'Giovannelli of Florence did it for me,' she said, as though she had not noticed.

The key of the book dangled from her bracelet.

What notes were these 'her friend' might see, but not her husband?

While Dalberg went on perfunctorily talking, Katharine glanced out of the window and saw Falconbridge driving up.

'Oh, he didn't get off. Here is Lord Falconbridge, after all.' As she turned round suddenly she met her husband's eyes. For the first time it was present to her that he might be seriously jealous. It seemed so out of character, that she ridiculed herself for the idea, and yet there was hope for them if he could be so foolish as be jealous. How should she make sure? Should she tell him by-and-by that she had half promised Blanche to go to

her at Little Matley for the week-end, to try in that way to wean herself (who was the greater baby), and how, after something Falconbridge had said yesterday about seeing her at the Bruton's, she had changed her mind?

No, it would be rather stupid of her to talk about the mistake Falconbridge had made. At the same time, she would be on the safe side. 'Will you tell Staines to say I'm not at home, Garth?' she said from the door. 'I'm going upstairs.'

'Falconbridge has not come to see you.' Vincent looked at his watch.

'Not come to see me?' She paused.

'No.'

'To see'—a formless uneasiness seized her—'to see *you*?'

'Oh, I have my uses,' he said grimly, as he nodded to Staines and followed the servant downstairs.

In that room where many a life or death sentence had been pronounced, the two men confronted one another after the examination.

'Well,' said Falconbridge in a hesitating voice, 'I've told you what is involved. Shall I go on?'

'No!' said the other with the sharpness of a gunshot.

Falconbridge paled to the lips.

'You mean it isn't safe?'

'I mean you won't be able.'

Falconbridge steadied himself with a hand on the writing-table.

'How much time have I?'

'At the rate you're going, not three months.'

'And if I stop?'

'If you stop—you may go on—— as long as other people.'

'If I stop in a fortnight——?'

'No! If you stop at once. To-day.'

They looked at each other while you might count five.

'I suppose,' said Falconbridge, 'you advise me to go away.'

'No,' returned the other sharply; 'I advise you to stop work, late hours, excitement, public-speaking, strain.'

When Vincent returned to the drawing-room, Dalberg was alone trying over some music.

He got up, lit a cigar, and waited till his friend told him moodily he believed he had stopped Falconbridge in time. He would refuse office. Dalberg looked at him. 'I suppose you don't doubt my friendship, old man.'

'Well, go on.'

'Was there no middle course?'

'Middle course?'

'A course that no one could construe doubtfully.'

'Oh, construe be damned! The man had to come to me for the truth!' A gleam of exultation crossed the grim face, but it went out with the last word, as he added: 'He knew I wouldn't give him—*poetry!*'

'It's a very big spoke to put in anyone's wheel,' said Dalberg.

'I didn't put in the spoke,' Vincent answered angrily. 'I only told him it was there.'

Dalberg lowered his eyes and looked at the end of his cigar. 'If you take away the public career of a man like that, you leave him——' He hesitated.

'Well?' demanded his friend.

'You leave him only his private'—he lifted his eyes and met Garth's—'his *very* private interests.'

Silently each man held the other's eyes till the door opened and Katharine reappeared.

'You've come to hear the news?' said her husband.

'What news?'

'About your friend.'

'You mean Lord Falconbridge?'

'He wanted to know if he was going to be able to stand the strain of office.'

She stood waiting. But he said nothing, the sense of awkwardness in the silence became unbearable—seemed to endow it with a significance to which it had no right.

'Well,' she said, 'what did you tell him?'

'He must give up public life.' Failing to find in her face what he seemed to search for, his dark look wandered moodily about the room. 'He'll have the more time,' he began, hesitated, and as his eyes fell on the locked book—'more time for poetry,' he ended, as he got up and left the room.

And then she knew.

Just before dinner on the following Monday evening, Vincent was urgently telephoned for by a patient in a critical condition.

'Such an awful night——' Katharine would have dissuaded him, but his face was all the answer she needed. 'At least you'll wait to dine?' she begged him. But he was gone. No time to put off Paul. The moment he appeared, Katharine felt a change in him. His stiffness had suddenly vanished, leaving him in a curiously happy, friendly mood.

He told her stories during dinner, and promised to make some music for her after. But instead of doing so, when they were alone again in the drawing-room, to Katharine's surprise he said suddenly, out of the blue:

'I think you dislike me rather less than you used. Am I right?'

Instead of protesting, she answered: 'I began by being very anxious to like you.'

'You succeeded rather ill at first, I gathered,' he went on good-humouredly. 'Come, now, what were your first impressions? You don't dare tell me.'

'I thought you both suspicious and insincere.'

'I gave you no cause for that,' he said, obviously a little dashed.

'Yes, you did.'

'How?'

'Unfortunately, only one comment of yours on Garth's marriage reached me.'

He looked at her a little anxiously. 'It could not possibly have been—I liked you from the first. Someone maligned me.'

She shook her head.

'What was it they told you I said?' he persisted.

'What you said was: "I wonder how long *that* will last!"'

'Oh—h'm! It was a common speculation.'

She got up suddenly, and walked to the window and back. 'Those two questions: Why had I married Garth, and how long would it last!' The low voice rose and fell unsteadily. 'You were all so unbelieving, so suspicious yourselves, you were sure I must be.'

'You haven't told me why you thought me suspicious.'

She stopped suddenly under the chandelier, and he saw why the soft eyes shone so. They were brilliant with tears. 'If you

have forgotten, I haven't. You didn't credit me with caring much for Garth, yet you fully expected me to be jealous of Mrs. Richard's sisters. You were sure I would be afraid of Sydney Ford.'

'Perhaps not of them,' escaped him as it were involuntarily.

She caught her breath and went on: 'You expected me to interfere even with the old custom of these Monday evenings. When you found I was at some pains to keep the time free, you wondered what motive I could have. Always looking for motives!' She turned away, evidently trying to master her growing agitation, and continued her restless walk. Dalberg was so wholly unprepared for this first failure on her part in self-control, that, himself a little nervous, he tried to stem the current of her emotion by an innocent jibe, as she repeated, a choke in her voice: 'Always, always looking for motives.'

'Haven't you heard it is the scientific habit of mind?'

She turned upon him: 'The simple explanation that I wanted my husband's closest friend to find no excuse in the new wife for slackening the old tie—*that* didn't appeal to you with any special force, "Women naturally dislike their husband's old friends"—that is one of your articles of social faith. Like many another who isn't subtle himself, you are afraid of the quality in others. There's nothing a man like you expects so much from a woman like me, as subtlety. You were mortally afraid of being taken in. I didn't seem so, but I must be complex'—breathlessly now the long-pent torrent poured forth. 'You were for ever occupied in translating me out of subtlety into plain English. I was "artistic"—save the mark! "Neurotic, probably," since I tried to write poetry; certainly without conscience or loyalty, since I'd lived in what the people outside it call "the smart world." It was incredible that I'—the beauty of her face was suddenly convulsed—'incredible that I was a simple-hearted woman who cared more for her husband than for anybody or anything in all the——' The low sound went out sobbing. She turned to hide her face. Paul sat dumbfounded.

Without looking at him, her veiled voice broke again upon the hush of the room. 'If he and I win through, we will not have our friends to thank! Mine always ready to remind him how I must miss'—something caught at her voice again—'how

unfit my life must have made me——’ She covered her face with her hands, but still spoke on: ‘His friends for ever ready to remind me of his “savage and unholy temper”—those are his *best* friend’s words, Paul’—she dropped her hands and turned sharply the arraignment of her tear-stained face upon the ‘best friend’ sitting there—‘all of you for ever and for ever reminding me of’—she stopped as though breathless before some spectral danger risen on a sudden in her path—‘reminding me of that Past, I have no share in.’ Something in her face appalled him. ‘The Past,’ she repeated, staring straight in front of her as at a tangible terror. ‘*The Past!*—that has risen from the grave, wearing still the grave-cloth on its face—more horrible for being unrecognisable, veiled, voiceless, and yet for ever there.’ She stood so long motionless, with wide eyes open to the vision, that Paul got up, took her by the arm and led her to the sofa, saying he knew not what halting words of friendship and regret. But the low shaking voice broke in again: ‘You and others have said so often. “How long will it last?” that we, too, have begun to say those, hideous, defeating words. We breathe infection, Garth and I.’

She had said good-night. He followed her to the door. ‘You were happier when you came,’ she said brokenly. ‘I am sorry.’

‘I wanted to tell you,’ he stammered, ‘that—that Sydney and I are going to be married next month.’

She turned back and held out her hand. But the look of suffering in the face that tried to smile brought tears to his unaccustomed eyes.

It was after this first open acknowledgment of the chasm that seemed to be widening between Garth and her, that Katharine asked herself dully, in the exhaustion that followed on abandonment to pain: ‘Is my love dead? Has he hurt me so much and so often that he has killed it? Even so I must justify my act.’ And the feeling gained upon her that it was only right, after all, that she should pay this price. Let better women refuse—she herself, perhaps, lacking the need to expiate, she might refuse, calling the price too great. But she had broken the social law, obeyed the prompting of the blood, and at peril of her last shred of dignity must pay the price; bear with him and for him to the end—in spite of anything that might befall, prove the some-

thing better than mere headlong passion that had flung her after him.

* * * * *

'It isn't only that he cries. Look at him, Garth. He isn't so well.' She had brought him the child in her arms, to hear him scoff away her fears!

But instead: 'No, he is not so well. You must stop nursing him.'

'Oh no—not *yet*.'

'To-day. I told you weeks ago, he must be weaned.'

'Oh yes, I *have* begun——'

'It's time you ended.'

He found later that she had given in to the child's wailing.

'You can't be trusted,' he said stonily. 'I shall have to send him away.'

'Send him away!' Was the man mad? But he nodded.

'I know very well you wouldn't do that, Garth.'

'If I did, you'd try to leave me, I suppose.'

The 'try' set her nerves obscurely tingling. Why only 'try'? But quietly she answered: 'No.'

'You would if I went too far.'

'No.'

'You would if you—came to hate me.'

'Not even then.'

'Why not?' he demanded, with as much harshness as if another answer would have pleased him better.

'Because leaving you would be to degrade the Past. There was offence in it, I don't deny. But it is redeemable offence. Don't be hard to me about the baby, Garth.'

'Redeemable.'

'Redeemable by showing I was right in my feeling if not in my act. If I was wrong about the strength of my feeling, I was unpardonable by any rule.'

'By God! how you split hairs!' he burst out. 'You mean such notions as those will keep you to your bargain?'

'Yes, Garth.'

'No matter what I do?'

'No matter what you do.'

Then, at the worst, he would not even have the enlightenment of her 'trying' to leave him. Was he *never* to know?

There was one way.

He had taken the first step along it when he had said he would send the child away. Very well had he come to realize that, in a creature like Katharine, except love lead, there is no power to accept the greatest nearness.

If he made the move to re-establish that, and she rebuffed him——

All his life leapt up in a flame.

By that test he would know.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Katharine came home after lunching out that Friday she ran up to the top of the house, as she often did in these days upon returning, without stopping even to take off her hat.

The pretty white room was empty.

Where was the baby? Gone with the nurse. Where was the nurse? No one knew. She had packed a small trunk and vanished.

Vincent had just started on his afternoon rounds. It might be hours before he would be back. Surely there was only one place to which, on such short notice, he would send the child.

There was barely time to catch the afternoon express to Winston. Hot foot and full of anger she fled to Victoria. Staines, promptly carrying out orders, telephoned to his master in the next street. Vincent re-appeared with Dalberg. He looked on the hall table as if for something he counted upon finding.

‘Any word left?’

‘No, Sir.’

Quite casually: ‘Did Lady Vincent say where she was going?’

‘She told the cabman “Victoria,” Sir.’

‘Who said the baby was at Winston?’

‘I don’t know, Sir.’

‘Ring up a messenger.’ In the consulting room he wrote out a telegram instructing the nurse to take the next train back to town.

Although he did not show his friend the message, quite as though Paul had remonstrated, Vincent, looking at what he had written, muttered in fierce extenuation: ‘Mothers are damned selfish!—disobey my orders—make the child ill——’

When he heard the bell ring he picked up the telegraph form, and made for the door, but stopped short hearing Mrs. Richard’s

voice. Sydney, too! Paul went into the hall to speak to them. Staines came for the message: 'Yes, Sir, the boy is here.'

As the servant went out counting the words, Mrs. Richard's high voice penetrated the consulting room: 'No—only came to leave word for you, Paul. We've just been to your house. I knew Katharine was away——'

Like a flash Vincent appeared at his door: '*How* did you know?'

'Oh, *you're* there—nursing your wrath all alone!' (She laughed as at some witticism.) 'I heard Mrs. Bruton arranging it on Wednesday. Those Little Matley week-ends are becoming quite celebrated. I wish she'd ask you and me, Garth. Very well, Paul, we'll expect you at eight.'

Little Matley. So that was Katharine's post-haste errand! Falconbridge's too.

When Dalberg rejoined him, Vincent was walking up and down the small room with set face and unseeing eyes.

'I don't in this case see the motive,' Paul said, 'but Mrs. Richard doesn't need a motive. It's easier for her to lie than not to lie.'

'It is to most people. I expect them to lie.'

'Not all, I suppose?'

'All except——' Vincent stopped abruptly, and turned to his writing-table, fumbling aimlessly among the papers lying there.

'In any event,' Dalberg spoke with a deliberate lightness, 'going to see Mrs. Bruton doesn't strike the onlooker as a thing unforgivable.'

'There's one thing I wouldn't forgive——' said the man at the table, crushing up the analysis paper nearest to his hand. Paul looked apprehensively into the changed face as Vincent added half to himself, 'If *Katharine* should lie to me——'

Just before the train drew up at Winston, another had gone Londonwards bearing back the child. All unconscious Katharine passed him on the line, finding out the truth only upon reaching the house.

Too late to return that night.

Nor was she sure that she should find her child in Cavendish Square.

Ah, he was very cruel!

A wave of anger carried her far from him. Balked emotion as poignant as hers will sap strength like a disease. Not losing consciousness till dawn, she slept on till nearly noon. A noise in the room roused her. Vincent!—flinging down a travelling-bag, and taking out his watch as if with thought of train-catching. And what was it in his face—had he been frightened into coming for her? Terror drove the sleep out of her eyes; half rising, she said:

‘He is ill—my baby’s dying!’

‘He is perfectly well.’

A sobbing little appeal escaped her—‘not . . . not crying any more?’

‘Not a whimper.’

She lay down among the pillows. The baby, too, had ceased to need her!

Garth turned his back upon her, opened his travelling-bag, and was flinging out his things.

Over the woman, as she watched him, the anger of the night before came flooding back. She wanted nothing but the child. Why had *he* come?

He had his question, too. Without turning round: ‘Why did you leave like that without telling me?’ he said suddenly.

Ah, he had come to a point where even he wanted explanation.

‘You know one reason why I left like that.’

‘What’s the other?’ he said, still with his back turned.

‘That I live in your house like a stranger.’

He was at the wardrobe now, absorbed in collecting his riding things and taking possession in the old way. After the first terrified misreading of his haggard looks, she had not seen his face. For fear he might suddenly look round again, she turned away her eyes.

His presence was an oppression, an intrusion. As she lay listening to the sound of his quick movement about the room, she found herself wishing passionately that she were back in her own, the room at Cavendish Square—still more that one at the top of the house looking out upon the plane-tree and William George. Within, a little white—— Ah, the tears!

This man, moving about with the sturdy air of possession—he could hurt her without a pang.

Not only her eyes avoided him now—she turned her back upon him, and looked through tears out of the open window to the great trees where a parliament of rooks was met. Remembrance came back upon her of that other time—in this very room, too—that bitter hour before Leonard's coming, over a year ago, when she had felt that her misery and sense of alienation must needs end in her going away. She had thought then that her suffering was the righteous outcome of her headlong act—the usual ending of a story such as hers. But certainly marriage had not closed that avenue to pain. Even more to-day than then, she felt the time was come when to be with him on the old terms was impossible. Fit action for a slave or a cocotte, who must disguise, pretend, and reckon with some sordid advantage at sacrifice of her last shred of personal dignity. The essence of the beauty of this relation was in the perfect heart. There must be no bitterness, no holding back—nothing between them but love, or the relation is degraded, and would show tarnish were she fifty times his wife.

Now his voice: 'You'd better get up and go for a ride.'

'There won't be time for that,' she said.

'Going over to Little Matley?' the question rang out quick and sharp.

'No.'

'You won't stay cooped up here all day.'

'No.'

'What's your programme?'

'I'm going back to town.'

He came to the foot of the bed, and stood there looking at her, with a face she had never seen before. 'Don't push me too far,' he said. 'If you did——'

She saw the slim hands working on the top of the footboard in a way that struck her as strangely horrible. Her heart began to beat with an inexplicable terror, and then she knew why. In imagination she had felt those brown hands at her throat. 'If I did?' she said.

'I don't know what might come.' He turned away and strode out of the room.

A sudden light now upon that saying, 'If you should try to leave me.' She knew she had had a glimpse of the old violence that the world was said to be outgrowing. Was the world out-

growing it? Or would there be always men of hot spirit who would not, could not stop to count cost?—who would go head-long to ruin, dragging others after? If the current view was right and there were to be no more—then was this the last of that tempestuous line.

She rose to meet what the day would bring. By the time she was dressed she had come to see that she could trust him about the baby. He loved the child. And after what he had said, still more after what he had looked, she would not go to town that day. She looked at the reminders of his late presence in the room. Neither could she stay here.

She had herself driven to the station, and told Jackson not to wait. A cab took her the rest of the way. 'After all, Blanche, here I am for the week-end,' she said, and while rapturously her friend welcomed her, 'Are you a large party?'

'No, only those I said—Bertie, Lord Falconbridge, the Chiltern girls and the Scotts.'

The men were rejoining them unusually soon. But it was already late, for the women had sat late about the board, prolonging a dinner that had gone with uncommon gaiety and spirit. Katharine and her hostess stood looking at the effect of the tapestry newly hung in the upper hall as the men streamed up the stair. One of the Chilterns, Falconbridge and Bertie, had also joined the group standing before the faded grace of the old hawking scene, when the front-door just below them resounded to knock and ring.

'Garth!' said Katharine involuntarily under her breath to Blanche.

'What makes you think——?' demanded Mrs. Bruton.

Katharine had drawn back a little, behind Lord Falconbridge—all the soul of her in quick revolt at the idea of a scene; at the bare possibility of these particular people, among all people under the sun, seeing her husband in the nakedness of passion. Better a thousandfold go back to Winston and wait there for whatever was to come.

Under cover of the hum: 'Kitty,' whispered Blanche, 'something's happened!'

'I had forgotten,' Katharine answered, in the same undertone, 'but I told him I was not coming here.'

Mrs. Bruton looked down over the banisters, and made the butler a sign: wait. Then with nothing in her face of her dread of a jarring incident, she said very low: 'If it *should* be he——'

'It is,' returned Katharine, as firmly as though she had known all along that he would stand there at this hour knocking at the door. 'If he's angry about your coming—or—anything—I don't think Lord Falconbridge's nerves are in a state to bear——'

'No—no,' returned Katharine under her breath,—'he must be told he will find me at home.'

'But you won't go!' Mrs. Bruton went forward suddenly to Lord Falconbridge. 'I know you're wise about such things. I wish you'd look at the smaller tapestry, and tell me what you think. Will you show it to him, Kitty?' After a look exchanged with Blanche, Katharine moved mechanically towards the morning-room.

She stood with Falconbridge before the new acquisition. 'Why are you so pale?' he asked, not even glancing towards the tapestry. Before she could answer, 'Ah!' he smiled satirically. Through the door they had left ajar that unmistakable voice! Mrs. Bruton's, answering over the banisters, albeit so much nearer, not half so clearly distinguishable: 'Oh, is that you, Sir Garth! Katharine? I'm sorry to say she refused to stay.'

'Has she gone?'

'Unhappily for us——'

'Gone where?'

'Why,' Mrs. Bruton sent down a disarming little laugh, 'where should she——'

'She's not in London.'

'No, not London.'

'Do you mean she has gone to Winston?' demanded Vincent.

'I suppose Winston, of course, is where she——'

'When?'

'Oh—a—I should think she'd be there before you get back.'

Falconbridge, imperturbable, was now for the first time looking at the tapestry.

'Did she go alone?' The voice came steadily nearer. He must be half-way up the stair.

'Alone!' repeated Mrs. Bruton. 'Why—a—yes. You see, Wilfred——'

'I want to see Bruton,' that other voice struck in, quite close to the door.

'Then come into the drawing-room.'

Katharine thought quickly. He would not only not find her there, he would not find Falconbridge. She turned to the great man, her eyes sparkling with anger and with fear.

'I'd like to speak to Bertie a moment. Would you mind——?' As plain as words could have done it, she asked him to present himself in the drawing-room, and quietly to let Bertie know. As plain as words could have done it, with no sparing of hauteur, Falconbridge refused. But what Falconbridge said was:

'Mind? Not in the least,' and he strolled over to a table where stood a shaded lamp, picked up a book, and idly turned the leaves.

No help from him.

To get home!—before humiliation overtook her.

She found herself hurriedly crossing the room to the door at the far end.

'You won't find Amherst that way,' said Lord Falconbridge coldly.

'No,' she answered, and still went blindly on, conscious that Falconbridge was leisurely following, some distance behind, through the little passages, up steps and down. When she came to the tiny, old-time, powder-room she went in and looked cautiously through a crack in the blind. One of the Bruton grooms was holding the vicious mare, that no one but Vincent dared to ride, let alone to drive. Then he must have wired from London for the dogcart to meet the last train to Little Matley. It would be hard to beat the mare home at the breakneck rate Vincent allowed her to cover the ground.

Katharine heard Falconbridge's steps pause at the powder-room door. She dropped the blind guiltily, and rang the bell.

He simply leaned against the door and waited till a servant came.

'Has Mr. Bruton got a motor-car in the stables here?'

‘There is only his lordship’s——’

‘Quite at your disposal,’ said Falconbridge quietly, ‘Tell Ferrier——’

‘I—I should be glad to have it at once,’ she said hurriedly, ‘at the garden entrance.’

* * * * *

That neither his wife nor Falconbridge was of the party at Little Matley, that seemed now to be what he had gone to establish. But they were together somewhere, and Vincent was driving along the moonlit lanes, bearing that damning knowledge back to his forsaken home.

As he reached the high road, suddenly he reined up, listening. The hollow horn of a motor-car warning some late prowler, stray dog, or straggled sheep—but what was a motor doing so far off the main highway, down there in the old, disused grass-grown road between the Little Matley gardens and the water meadows? Who was foolish enough to ride into that swamp? He stood up in the dog-cart, till a curve in the lower road gave him a glimpse of a light. Yes, some lunatic taking the old coach road from Parminton to . . . where?—deliberately passing all the lanes that would bring him up on the good road. What fool was skulking, and bumping along, at this hour of the night from Parminton to Great Matley?—Winston? Like a match struck in a cave a light flashed in his brain. Had Mrs. Bruton been shielding her friend? Did she know Katharine had been to Parminton? And why Parminton? And in whose car? It was out of sight. He sat thinking. What better thing to do with the nightmare hours, than leave the cart and get a saddle at the inn, set the mare at the fences, and ride cross-country straight as the crow flies, through the Winston Woods, and meet that erratic motor where the old road joined the new—meet it and see?

When Katharine had reached the garden entrance she was thankful to find the motor already there; but two figures sitting in the car! Not Ferrier alone, Ferrier’s master. Well, what did anything matter but to get home, and to get home quickly, without passing Garth on the way?

Not yet spent was the wave of fear and anger that had carried her off her feet, and yet dimly she began to see, that the ebbing

of that tide was leaving unsightly wreckage on the shores of her life. Nothing in her nature was stronger than her sense of loyalty; yet—slowly it came over her as they rushed along, that loyalty, for the first time, had suffered disaster in the storm.

Falconbridge talked to ears that heard only that harsh voice on the Little Matley stairs, and Blanche's soft, misleading answers. Mistaken as it may have been, there was nothing ignoble in Garth's coming unexpectedly for his wife; no offence whatever save in her way of meeting—or not meeting—his demand. She had made him ridiculous. She clenched her hands. Had stood behind the door with people that he hated, and heard him lied to! Now, again, she saw Lord Falconbridge's sneering look of comprehension. What had possessed her to bear that? Why had she not gone out and said, 'I'm here'—let come what might? If some day Garth heard the truth—— She shut her eyes. She shut her ears: saying to herself, 'I *have* been patient, but now I've forfeited all chance of profit from my patience by an act of cowardice. Oh, how much more potent is wrong-doing than righteousness! One good deed cannot save us—one bad one damns to all eternity. In a moment's baseness I lose all I ever gained.'

She was leaning out over her side of the car trying to distinguish the Great Matley lights. How long this old way was!—and how fast the mare was flying by the shorter road!

'You are too distressed to listen to-night,' the voice at her side was saying. 'I won't pretend that I don't understand.' Lord Falconbridge put out his hand. She thought he was feeling for the rug she had pushed down. 'No,' she said; 'I'm burning up!' The impatience in her voice gave him pause.

'You are quite unstrung,' he said sympathetically. 'It can't go on like this. Something must be done to bring a little happiness into your life.' Again his hand went stealthily seeking hers.

'Oh, happiness!' she said, with an accent that made him draw away. Still she stared out, watching the road in front of the fan of light, that they seemed to be pushing along in front of them.

'Why do you say it in that tone?' he demanded, 'as though happiness were so little?'

'Certainly I no longer think it all,' she answered.

'You are bravely making the best of a——'

She leaned towards him for the first time; saying almost sharply: 'Don't call my life a bad bargain. I can't allow that.'

'Ah, you pay gallantly the dreamer's penalty. You stand committed to make the dream come true. Or failing——'

'If I *have* failed'—she interrupted again but on a different note, with an effect of both humbleness and pride, that baffled Falconbridge—'if I have failed, it isn't the worst of failure.' Now she had turned away her head again, but did she know, for all that her eyes seemed to be searching in the gulf of blackness between the fan of moving light and the far moonlit distance—did she know that Falconbridge leaned over, with lips almost at her ear? Suddenly she clasped the ungloved hands in her lap, and with eyes still looking for the Great Matley lights, very low she said: 'I cannot in my mood of deepest self-abasement believe my husband would have found—less unhappiness with some other woman.'

'But *you*. Great Heaven! What of you?'

'I would rather be unhappy with the man I have chosen, than happy with any other. Isn't that the test, after all?'

'I can't pretend to understand.'

'In that case—ah, at last! You see? You see the lights?'

'No, I am still absolutely in the dark,' he said, and his well-controlled voice showed by contrast all the sore anxiety, the strong excitement, that throbbed and broke in hers.

Instead of lessening, her agitation seemed to grow as they rushed through the silent town. She leaned forward and spoke to the chauffeur. 'Couldn't you go faster?' On they flew.

'Since I may not see much of you in the future,' she said suddenly to Falconbridge, 'I think I owe it to—all of us, not to leave you with misapprehension.'

'Yes, you had begun to say, "in that case"—supposing I still fail to understand?' His cold smile was like an insult.

She lifted her face to meet the wind, and when she spoke it was with a curious hard breathlessness, as one who, with huge effort to rise above the tyranny of nerves, concentrates all her being upon bearing faithful witness in some final hour.

'You have only to remember,' she said, 'that in these matters there's something in character that makes fitness. I suppose it is only after character is developed—bent this way or that by the

prevailing wind blowing through one's life—only then that we know what, for us, makes fitness. And I grant you fitness is as mysteriously made as joy, which you know (or may have heard) men have found—delicate women, too—in the roughest, pain-fullest places.'

He left her at the door.

She looked at the hall clock with amazement. After all they had made wonderfully good time. Not only was she home first, the car would get back to the old road before Vincent could meet it.

On the dressing-table lay the white vellum book, wrenched and marred, the lock broken off.

Well, he had seen the Baby's Songs—what then? Why was she trembling? It was as if some of the heat and tumult of the passion with which he had torn the book, lingered yet about the ruined thing to touch her with contagion. She could see him doing this. His bootless errands to London, and to Little Matley, would not have made him gentler. Oh, why had she fled away? She might have known it would only make things worse. 'I must keep my head,' she said to herself as she hid the shattered book in a drawer. 'I may have to save him from himself to-night. To-night? *No!*' her nerves cried out. 'To-morrow. He would see clearer then.' She crossed the room to bolt the door, paused, listened, opened it cautiously, went out and stood at the top of the stairs. All quiet. She went back and rang her bell.

'Was the octagon room got ready for the nurse?'

'Yes, m' lady,' said the sleepy maid.

'Take Sir Garth's things in there. Ask him, when he comes, please not to disturb me. I hardly slept last night.'

'He's gone to London, m' lady——'

'Just move his things—and quickly. I am very tired.'

For all that, when the maid at last was gone, and the doors locked and bolted, Katharine did not go to bed, did not even undress. She turned out the blazing light, drew up the blinds, and sat by the open window facing the gate. The time dragged leaden. Surely he ought to be back by now. The sleepy maid would be giving in to weariness. He might not get the message——

She left the window and threw herself on the bed. Vividly a vision of him stamped itself upon the dark, Garth as he had

stood there that morning at the foot of the bed, his quick brown fingers moving in that horrible way, and his slow lips saying: 'If you did—I don't know what might come.'

Hush! was that a horse galloping? 'I'd think that must be Garth if I didn't know he had the dog-cart.' While she listened for wheels, the moments passed.

More than once she said to herself, I must keep my head. The sense was all about of impending horror. She sat up suddenly. Someone was moving in the house. Not he, for she would have heard him driving in at the gate.

The handle of the door turned. She held her breath.

'Open the door!' he said.

She had meant to answer, if at all, quietly, from the bed—but the voice brought her to her feet, carried her across the room.

'Wait till morning, Garth.'

'Open the door!'

Silence. She looked at the bolt, saying to herself with exultant terror, that it was strong. And still as she stood on the inside, he stood there without, waiting, but straining to send every sense through the barrier between them.

The woman holding her breath on the other side, felt as if those fierce eyes were forcing sight through the fibres of the wood. The sound of his breathing came to her. Every nerve in her body was conscious of the intensity of his listening.

'Open the door or I'll——'

She recoiled, and waited rooted there, till she heard his quick step going down the corridor. Thank God! She turned up the light, and with uncertain fingers felt for the clasp of her necklace. At that instant the dressing-room door was tried—was shaken.

'I shall not open the door till morning——'

Before the words were fairly out, a great noise burst upon the quiet. That sole barrier between her and what was to come, the solid door, shivered and cried out. A sound of crashing and splintering followed hard—a sound to her shrinking nerves as if the very foundations of the house were being broken up, and as by some explosion, scattered to the winds of heaven. With that last harsh splintering, the second of the lower panels gave way. Vincent had stooped and was coming in, head lowered like a bull red-eyed, maddened. He did not advance upon her, but upon

the other door, still locked, bolted, chained; and now his eyes were making circuit of the room.

‘What are you looking for?’ she said.

He came close. She fell back before his advance, until arrested by his words, for the words were like a cry for help. ‘Don’t ever do it again. Say what you like to me—but don’t ever lock me out. It makes me see red!’

Her fictitious strength was suddenly gone. She sank into the chair under the light. As her upturned eyes rested on his tortured face, something strange in experience, something altogether new seized hold on her, and her heart, which she had hardened, was suddenly like molten wax—for looking in his face was like looking in an open wound. While her wide eyes filled, the form before her that had seemed to her iron and granite made man—slightly it swayed.

‘Garth!’ She held up her hand.

A ragged, stifled cry came out of his lips, and he was on his knees, his face hidden in her lap. No anger of his had ever seemed to her so terrible as that torn and tortured cry. It was like some convulsion of inanimate Nature, dwarfing the narrow human experience, beggaring her of words, leaving her trembling and dumb. That cry of his still sounded in the silent room. It lived on, long after it had left his lips. It cried again from the cornice. It echoed from window to door. She held her clasped hands shaking to her breast, looking about wildly, as if to find him help. Then as her eyes fell upon the figure crouching at her feet, and she realized him kneeling there like a little child, she began to sob softly above his hidden face. So often she had said in her heart, ‘If only you really loved me,’ she never knew that, bending over him now, she said the words aloud, until she heard him answering: ‘It is because of that. You can say anything you like. *Don’t lock me out.*’

‘I never will again,’ she answered, laying her cheek on his hair.

‘Garth, I was at Little Matley, when you came to-night. I heard you asking . . .’ Still no sign. ‘Blanche lied because she thought—she knew, I was afraid.’

He repeated: ‘You were afraid?’

‘Oh yes, I was afraid. I am afraid now; but I have to tell you.

It was because I was afraid I came by the old coach road in a motor-car—— Lord Falconbridge brought me home.'

'I know he did.'

'How could you know?'

'I rode through the wood. I saw you pass.'

She waited, knowing that she and the man at her side had skirted disaster close that night.

'Please tell me, have you been jealous, Garth?'

'You haven't thought much about me of late,' he said in dogged self-defence,—'the nearest you came to that, was to think of the child.'

But although it was so untrue, the saying shed a light.

'And through it all'—she framed his face between her hands—'do you mean that you loved me through it all?'

'It's not to be helped that I love you.'

She laughed upon the edge of tears.

'Oh, Garth, Garth, there's nobody in all the world, but would think it a disaster to be you or me—and yet how do they, those people who have lived calm, unshaken lives, how can they be sure of each other, as you and I are sure?'

But he had no more words to-night than common.

'If any power but death,' she ended softly, 'could have parted you and me, we should not be together now.'

'No,' he said.

'What about the future? when the black moods come again—' she clung closer to him.

'They won't—so long as you make me feel I am near to you. And that no one else is,' he added fiercely.

Ah, *she* was to take care of the Future.

Involuntarily she said, 'And the Past?'

That term for him seemed strangely contracted, for like one confidently calling up a witness on his side, 'Do you forget,' he said, 'the months here before the baby was born?'

'If I have, I never will again,' she answered. 'The Past' for her, too, should mean that tender happy time.

After all these months of waiting for him to speak, after being so sure that her love must inevitably win from him the story of

those other years—who and where, and how, and all the rest—now, waking beside him in the dawn, it suddenly came over her, that she should never know these things. He would love her well—of that she was assured—and he was steadfast unto stubbornness. But she would never get him to lift the veil. And for a moment the thought chilled her. But the late realization of the truth was at last sun-clear. He had none of the artist's reflex pleasure in contemplating himself in pain. His way was to damn the circumstance, and then do all he could to forget it. Even if he remembered, memory would never get so far as speech. If he had few words for present need, he would have none at all for the past. All these weeks in London, she had felt the barrier of the unknown years rise between her and him high, impassable, impregnable—and for a while the barrier had shut out joy. But only for a while. She saw by the light of the new morning, that what she had deplored as a flaw in the faith that she hoped to establish between them, was no flaw of his making. It was a thing essential, inevitable—part of the human lot. She had thought that other husbands, close to their wives in sympathy and devotion, told them their past. But did they? Not one had told, or could tell everything. To any but the least sensitive, even the vaguest reminder of these things set the nerves jarring. And yet this source of pain lay behind every marriage made late enough to be founded on the rock of proved fitness. Her good fortune it was, that Garth would never make those old days live again, by any word of his. They seemed the more securely dead. They were as if they had never been.

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